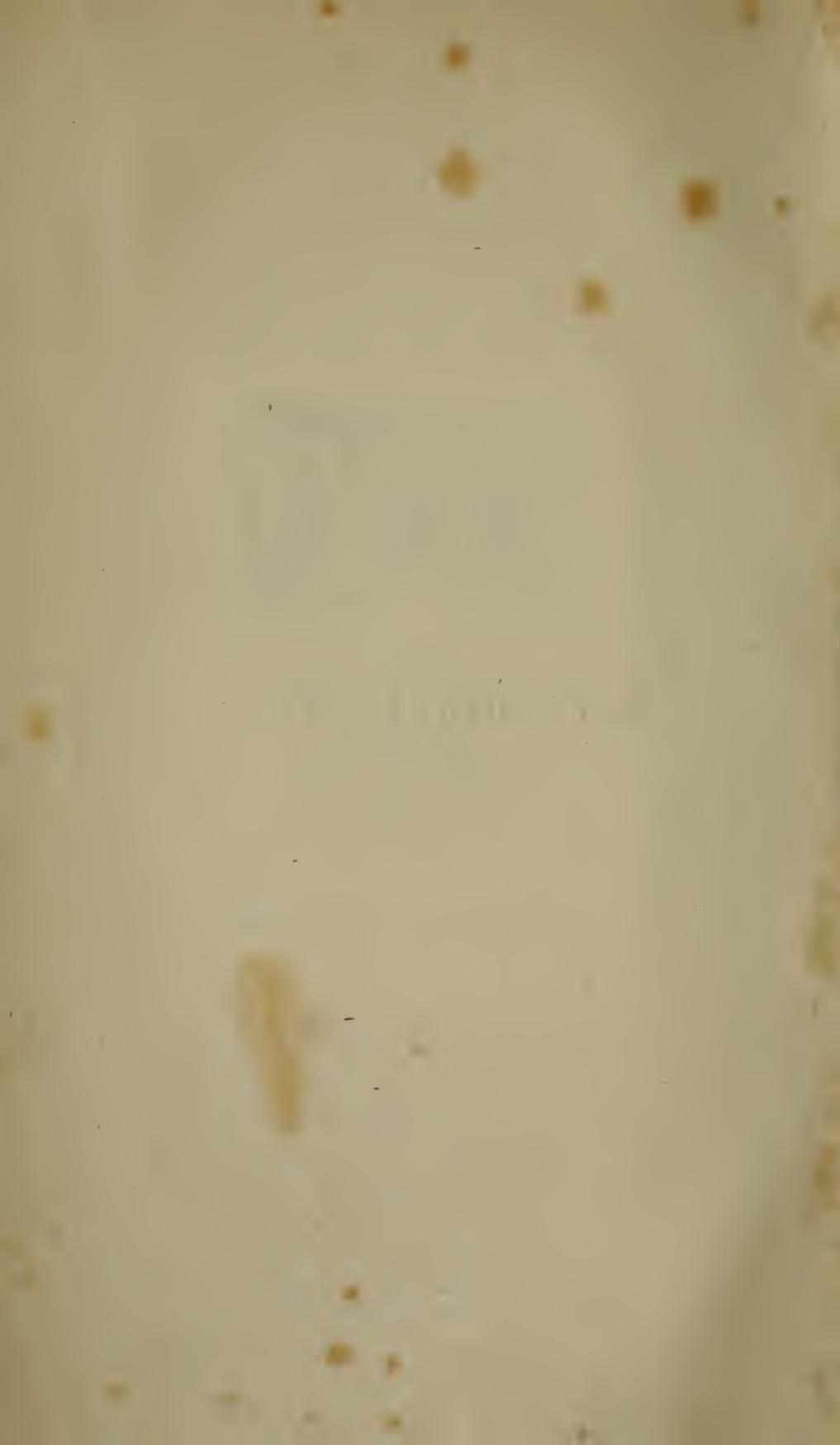


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A PRODIGAL SON.



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A PRODIGAL SON.

BY

DUTTON COOK,

AUTHOR OF

“PAUL FOSTER’S DAUGHTER.”

“A lytel misgoyng in the gynning causeth mykel error in the end.”

—CHAUCER’S “TESTAMENT OF LOVE.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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A PRODIGAL SON.

CHAPTER I.

GOOD ACCOMMODATION FOR MAN AND BEAST.

WOULD he live through the night? Would he die before his eldest son arrived? Could it be that the parent and the child, separated since so many years, were not to meet again on this side of the grave? How many times had the sun gone down upon their wrath, and risen again to find it yet turbulent and restless, and surging like a sea that would not be stayed! And *now*, would not even

Death bring penitence, and peace, and forgiveness?

Who could answer? Not pale Mr. Fuller, the surgeon of Grilling Abbots, the nearest town: not Dr. Barker, who had come over expressly summoned from the Mowle Infirmary: not Dr. Chillingworth, who had hurried down post-haste from London. They had met in serious conclave round the sick man's bed. They had held a solemn—almost a grim—consultation upon the case. They had retired to the library adjoining, and whispered each other, and compared notes. They talked so earnestly, yet in voices so subdued they were inaudible a few yards off, while their heads approached together in so close a cluster that they seemed almost to pertain to one body, and looked like three apples growing on a single stalk. Pale Mr. Fuller underwent a sort of friendly

cross-examination as to the course of treatment he had pursued; he set forth his medicines, and his motives in applying them: he stated his knowledge of the invalid, with particulars as to age, constitution, previous illnesses, predisposition to disease, &c. The doctor from Mowle patted the surgeon of Grilling Abbots familiarly, yet approvingly, on the shoulder. The physician from London patted both his professional brothers on the back, and nodded a great many times his approbation at all they had said and done. "Nothing could have been better—nothing, nothing," he said; and they had each a glass of Madeira and a biscuit. They could not answer, they said, for the poor sufferer's life: no, they agreed,—not from one moment to another.

Who could answer, then, if these could not? Certainly not that cosy group of

guests round the glorious red fire in the large room of the George Inn, Grilling Abbots.

Would the old gentleman last through the night? Was old Mr. Hadfield of the Grange really going? So they asked each other in low, awful whispers. The question went buzzing round as though it had been part of a fireside forfeit game, and each man was bound to propose it to his neighbour, and to give to it an evasive answer when *his* turn came to be examined on the subject. Indeed, it might have been a game. It was the season of the year for forfeits, and such amusements. The day after Christmas Day. There was merriment enough and to spare at other places. There was a grand ball at Mowle, for instance; while up in London, very likely, there were thousands shrieking with laughter at the

clown's first leap on to the stage—at his soiling his new clean motley in his first slip and tumble. There was little mirth, though, at Grilling Abbots. They were warm and snug, the fire glowing splendidly, the kettle always proffering boiling water, the mugs full, and the rummers emitting most deliciously inebriating perfume. But there was no mirth. This question about old Mr. Hadfield oppressed all terribly. Already there seemed to be a gloom as of crape covering and saddening them.

It was a small enough event from any other than a Grilling Abbots point of view: that must be admitted. It was like an explosion in a room—it would break the windows possibly, and make the children next door scream and clutch their mother's skirts; but out of a certain small radius it would be quite inaudible. Yes,

they would hear it at Mowle ; they would be moved by it at Mowle—not, of course, so much as at Grilling Abbots, but still considerably. You know *he* had sat for Mowle—in the old times before the Reform Bill. No, he never set foot in the House after the Bill. He swore he never would, and he kept his oath. There was no mistake about him. If he once said a thing, he kept to it through thick and thin,—ay, that he did. A true, staunch, stout old English gentleman—that he was. There was no mistake about him. They were all agreed upon that. Yes, they would feel his loss at Mowle. But in London ? Those Cockney chaps would read it in the newspaper at breakfast over their eggs, their precious London milk and eggs (how derisive the rural inhabitant is always on the state in which the town-dweller receives these dainties !) ; they

would read in the paper a simple line or two—

On the 26th December, George Richard Saxon Carew Hadfield, of Hadfield Grange, Grilling Abbots, Uplandshire, in the 72nd year of his age, deeply lamented—

and think and care nothing about the matter, and never know how valued was the old man in the neighbourhood of his estate, how good a friend he had been to the poor of Grilling Abbots ; how treasured were his name and his memory amongst them ; how old a family he came of, and how many pages were devoted to the chronicles of his house in that interesting work, the “History of Uplandshire.”

There must of course be limits to grief. The bereavement which crushes one heart so cruelly is mere gossamer weight to another. The life to *that* man all in all is as nothing to *this*. Can we truly sorrow for one we have never heard of even,

much less seen? Perhaps it is as well that we have some invulnerable places in our hearts. Were we to mourn each time that Death strikes down a victim, when should we joy?

“When did the Hadfields come into the county?” they were asking in the large room at the George. Was it in the time of the Henrys or the Edwards?

They referred to the schoolmaster. He drew hard at his pipe. If the answer was worth having, it is presumable that it was worth waiting for. He appeared to be counting, as though he were obedient to that direction in music which requires you to wait so many bars before you come in again with your contribution to the harmony. But the schoolmaster waited too long, especially as the answer he was finally able to give was of so vague and incomplete a character. He wasn’t sure, he said.

You see, he'd only come into the county himself within the last twenty years—Woodlandshire, that was *his* native county. But he thought the Edwards. Yes, he was nearly sure about it—it *must* be the Edwards. Still, his uncertainty sent him down terribly—regarded as a man of general information—in the estimation of the assembly. For some considerable time afterwards he ruled very low—as the money-market people phrase it—and was indeed, I should say, quoted at quite a nominal price.

However, they were a very old family, the Hadfields, there was no doubt about that.

“A reverend thing,” says Bacon, “to see an ancient castle or building not in decay, or to see a fair timber tree sound and perfect. How much more to behold an ancient family, which hath stood

against the waves and weathers of time!"

A very old family—the schoolmaster told no one news when he told *that*. They had been seated at a very early period in Uplandshire—that was no great news either. Surely all Grilling Abbots knew *that*. They had received territorial grants from Henry VIII. at the dissolution of the Monasteries—that was certain also. And there was a Richard Hadfield, barrister-at-law, Recorder of the city of Oldport, Serjeant-at-Law, and Queen's Serjeant (38th Elizabeth, 1596), who had purchased additional adjoining lands (the Broadmede estates, indeed, which had belonged originally to Broadmede Priory) of Henry, third Earl of Chevedale, the grantee at the dissolution. Sir Hugh Hadfield was sheriff of the county in the tenth year of James I., and received the honour of knighthood at the coronation of Charles I.

He erected the family seat on the site of an ancient Grange of the old Abbey of Grilling. Sir Hugh's house was a noble building, in the form, it was said, as regarded its ground-plan, of a **I**, in compliment to James I. Since that period, however, the house had undergone considerable alteration, and the idea of its founder had been greatly departed from. Part had been pulled down and rebuilt. A George Hadfield, in the reign of Anne, had embraced the Roman Catholic faith, and attached a chapel to the house. His son and grandson had reverted to the religion of their forefathers, and had permitted the chapel to fall into a state of hopeless decay. It must also be said of them that they combined to cut off the entail, destroyed the timber, sold great portion of the Broadmede property, and left

heavy encumbrances upon the estates for their successors to struggle with and pay off. Part of the Hadfield lands had indeed been already lost to the family during the Civil War, in which the Hadfield family were devoted partisans of the Stuarts. At the Restoration, a Court of Claims re-established the family in a large share of their possessions; but before they could recover the whole, an order of the King in Council dissolved the Court. In 1682, Thomas, the younger son of Sir Hugh,—to carve out for himself a fortune, or to repair the disasters of his family,—had sailed for America, and settled in Maryland, marrying there. In a last letter received from him, many years later, he had stated that his wife was dead, and also one of his two children, and that having acquired a large

fortune and sold his lands for 40,000*l.*, he intended returning to England, bringing with him all his money in specie, and his only surviving son, to introduce to his relatives, and to be himself interred in the family mausoleum at Grilling Abbots. But nothing further had ever been heard of him; and it was supposed that he had been lost at sea with his son and all his property.

Carved over the park gateway and the porch on the terrace, but very worn now, and moss-grown, and with orange lichen patches over it, the crest of the Hadfields is still traceable. Let the history of the county state it heraldically: —“A dove, ar. beak and legs, gu. standing on a serpent rowed ppr. *Motto*, ‘Soyez sage et simple.’” And in that beautiful chamber—(it is used as a library now, and it is the room in

which the medical gentlemen had their consultation and their Madeira)—wainscoted with carved oak of rich and elaborate pattern and most skilful workmanship, is to be seen in admirable preservation an almost unequalled specimen of the richly-decorated withdrawing-room of the time of James I. The chimney-piece is decorated with the Royal arms and the initials of James, while amidst the thick crust of ornamentation on either side are to be found the bearings of Sir Hugh, the builder, and of the family of his wife, one of the Saxons of Hilleshire.

Not all this did the schoolmaster narrate to the guests of the George—yet something of it—they could not have borne it all. For they grew giddy with going so far back, just as people are dizzied by a great height. They wouldn't

let go the present to trust themselves with the past. There was a sort of magnetic attraction about the business before them. They were held to it as by a chain—they would stretch out to the limits of their links, but they always returned to the original position. Would he live to see his son?

Who remembered Mr. Wilford? Nearly all in the room. Why, it was seven years ago that he went away. No, man, no, not so much. Yes, just seven years. Mrs. Joyce, the landlady of the George, fixed the time to a day—almost to an hour. It was the day her son Jeremiah—her fifth child—was born. She was in bed at the time, as Dr. Fuller could certify, if he were there, which he wasn't. Jerry was born in November, at half-quarter-day. Nobody could gainsay evidence so circumstantial as that. The fact

was generally accepted that Mr. Wilford had gone away little better than seven years ago. Lord, what a long time ago it seemed !

Why had he gone ? Nobody liked this question. They shirked it ; they shrugged their shoulders ; they looked hard at the ceiling. They passed on the inquiry. They said : " Ah ! why, indeed ? " and each looked as though he expected some one else to answer. He was a fine young fellow ; they were all agreed as to that. A very fine young fellow. A handsome boy, with a bright dark eye, and black hair as thick as a horse's tail. Farmer Corbet had a story to tell about the young gentleman coming over the hedge, in among his oats, playing the devil and all with them, said the farmer. But he behaved well (he went on)—a lad of sperrit, and a gentleman, one of

the old Hadfields, and as like as two peas to the picter up in the long room of the Grange of that one ever so long ago as went to Indy, and got lost. Amerikey, was it? Well, it was all the same. Poor young gentleman! Perhaps the old Squire was too hard with him—too quick and sharp. The old Squire could be at times, they all agreed. Mr. Wilford wasn't the one for that sort of treatment. He couldn't bear too much of it. He was of the old Hadfield blood—a fiery temper when he was once roused: and what a black frown came over his face! and he'd give back word for word, they agreed. Yes, *and blow for blow*, said some one; and then there was an awful silence.

They were like children playing at a game; they were gradually growing warmer, and soon warmer—warmer—hot

—very hot—then the game was played out—they had reached the climax. They had touched the answer to the question. As they all knew, the story went that the separation of Mr. Hadfield and his eldest son was in this wise: Angry words had passed between them—the dispute raged violently. In his passion the father had struck his son, and the blow had been returned. They had never met since, and Wilford Hadfield had never since set foot in Grilling Abbots.

True or false, this story was the under-current explanation of the division between the Squire and his son. All knew it, though all shrank from discussing it openly. It was one of the ghosts of Grilling Abbots, this narrative. To be alluded to very carefully, in whispers, with shut doors. True or false, it was a fact that, now on his death-bed, the Squire

had sent for his son. Would Wilford Hadfield reach the Grange in time?—he was running a race with Death.

“Snawing fast,” said William, ostler, coming into the room to light a lantern or a pipe, or on some such specious errand. In truth, perhaps, to get a little warmth from the fire, or to carry away a slice or so of the conversation of the large room to amuse himself with in the dreadful solitude and tedium of his life in the stable-loft, or to be asked to take a draught from somebody’s mug, or maybe a sip from somebody else’s rummer.

“I said it was coming down,” remarked the schoolmaster. But he did not improve in value much by the observation, for upon inquiry it seemed that every one in the room had ventured upon a similar prophecy—all had agreed that it would come down hard before morning; they

had said so quite early in the day, by the look of the sky.

“Like a blanket. Can’t hardly see before yer.” What a time William ostler was lighting his pipe!—surely his eyes were roaming from mug to mug, rather enviously.

“Here, William,” says Mrs. Joyce; “it must be bitter cold in stable.” She hands him a jug of something smoking hot, strong in flavour. A smile stars his face all over with lines and creases. He does not smile simply with his mouth; he brings his forehead, his cheeks, his eyebrows and eyes, even his shock head of hair, into the business. He stands in a curved attitude, with his head well out from his body, for fear any soiling drops should fall upon his chess-board patterned velveteen waist-coat. He raises his shoulders and squares his elbows. The process of drinking seems

with him to need nothing so much as free play of the arms. He waves the jug three times, perhaps as a sort of incantation to secure luck ; perhaps to mix well together its contents. He seems rather inclined to make a speech, or drink the health of the company ; but he evidently does not quite see his way comfortably through either of these formulæ ; so he abandons further ceremony, and empties the jug.

He draws a long breath. Tears are in his eyes. Tears of joy, of gratitude, not of sorrow ; or perhaps it is the excessive heat of his libation that has acted as an irritant upon his lachrymal glands.

“ Groom Frank’s outside,” he remarks, applying the back of his hand violently to his lips, as though to rub well into his skin the flavour of his drink. “ Come down from Grange.”

“ What for ? Why don’t he come in ? ”

says Mrs. Joyce; “ he’s never standing out in the cold ? ”

“ No ; he’s under cover—brought horses down. Master Stephen bid him.”

“ To meet Mr. Wilford ? ”

William ostler nodded. The whole room was listening, and he seemed rather pleased at being so greatly an object of interest. It was a novel position for him, quite. Why, at that moment Mr. and Mrs. Joyce were mere cyphers compared to William, ostler ; while the schoolmaster —bah ! he was out of the question altogether. William went on—

“ Old gentleman’s very bad.”

It was the latest intelligence from the Grange, and was received with breathless interest.

“ All say he’s going fast as he can ; but he’s sensible, groom Frank says—so the housekeeper told ’em in the kitchen. He’s

asked again for Master Wilford—keeps on asking for him. So Master Stephen sends down groom Frank with horses to meet him, 'cause, if this snaw goes on, he'll have a job to get through Chingley Bottom; and as for going on to Grange with same horses, with that road what it is, and what I've known to be any winter these last twelve years, why, it's more than horseflesh can do—that's what it is. A horse can't do more than a horse can, and if you goes for to try——”

But he stopped short, listening attentively.

“Wheels!” he cried.

All the room listened. Some declared it was fancy; others, no such thing. They could hear them quite well. The schoolmaster said he could hear nothing, but then he was a little hard of hearing on one side; yet, he said, with an air of philo-

sophy, that he had often noticed that when people particularly wanted to hear a particular sound, then they were always given to think they *did* hear it. The remark was not thought much of, especially as the schoolmaster was wrong. The sound of wheels was now distinctly audible. William, ostler, ran out with a lantern. Somebody drew the red curtains from before the long low window of the George. The heat of the room had clouded the glass. Many were occupied in rubbing clear a diamond pane of glass here and there, so that they might look out at the night and see what happened, as through peepholes.

“Lord! how it was snowing!” “Why, the ground was quite white—the snow an inch thick already!” “What a draught there was with the front door open!” Oh! how cold!” “Who was that man out-

side there, beyond the trough and the sign-post?" "Why, groom Frank, of course, with the change of horses."

"Yo-ho! Yo-ho! O! O!"

"Yo-ho! Yo-ho! O! O!"

The postillion from afar off echoes William ostler's cry. Now you can plainly hear the dull thumping of the wheels over the rough road muffled by the snow. You can see the red carriage lights gleaming through the clouds of steam rising from the horses. The carriage makes slow progress in spite of all the whipping and spurring and the shrill threats and encouragement of the post-boys. Indeed the horses are nearly dead-beat—you can hear their pantings through all the noise. What a ghastly look about the carriage, white with snow on all one side where the wind has been blowing—a thick cake of snow on the roof, snow

on the lamps even, half melting—snow on the harness, on the horses—on every slightest projection to which it can cling by any possibility. Snow, too, on the cap of the traveller—on his shoulders, on his flowing jet-black beard. He has been leaning out of the window, passionately urging on the postboys.

“Why are you stopping, d—n you!” he cries out savagely.

Groom Frank is at the window in a minute, touching his hat. “The horses are quite done up—there’s no going on further with them to-night. He has brought down fresh from the Grange. They’ll be put to in two minutes. There’s a good fire in the large room of the George. They can start again in two minutes.”

“Is he alive?” the traveller asks in a husky whisper.

“Yes, sir;” and groom Frank touches his hat, “but—”

“But what?”

“But very poorly—very poorly indeed.”

He frowned almost fiercely—they could see that much from the window of the George—he gave the man—a sovereign, wasn’t it? he came down from the carriage and strode into the house. A tall, pale, haggard man, with wild-looking eyes. He took no notice of anybody in the room. He kicked the snow from his boots, and was soon toasting his feet on the bars of the roaring red fire. There was a dead silence in the room. The company seemed quite paralysed by his presence; no one dared to move a limb, though each managed to glance at him stealthily.

“Give me some brandy.”

Mr. Joyce himself obeyed the order, but he hesitated for a moment.

“With hot or cold water?”

“With neither.” Rather angrily spoken.

He drained it off at once. How his thin, long white hand shook—all in the room managed to notice that somehow; so it was discovered, when they began to compare notes afterwards—how his hand shook as he took up the glass!

“You’re Joyce?” he asked suddenly. The landlord bowed.

“Yes, I remember,” he said, with a faint smile. He passed out of the room again—he threw down some money in the bar.

“Now then, make haste. Am I to wait all night?” and he stamped on the ground.

What a cloud round those poor panting wearied horses, with drooping heads and bent knees. The company had rubbed fresh peep-holes in the

window-panes, again dim with the heat; they could see the traveller mount into his carriage again.

“Off with you!” he cried; and they whirled him at a furious pace along the road to the Grange, the snow now thicker than ever.

“Please God he gets there in time,” said good Mrs. Joyce, fervently.

“It’s *him*,” she went on after a pause, “I knew him directly. There’s no mistaking those fierce black eyes of his, if you’ve once seen them. Yet how he’s changed—how old-looking—how thin and white; perhaps that’s the cold, though—he’s been travelling a long while, likely enough, and it’s a bad night for travellers. We ought to be very thankful we’re all in front of a good fire, and with a roof over our heads, such a night as this. Yes, he’s changed—fifteen years older

he looks ; and what a long black beard—
for all the world like a furriner."

"Like a Frenchman, a'most," said Farmer Corbet. "I don't fancy an Englishman wearing mustarchies myself," and he rubbed his shaven chin meditatively. "It seems unnat'ral like to wear all that hair on one's face."

"How quick he swallowed that brandy ! Wonderful, I call it," remarked Mr. Joyce.

"Please God the old gentleman lives to see him and to make it up with him. Why do people ever quarrel, I wonder ! I'm sure this ought to be a warning to us."

The events of the evening had made the landlady thoughtful.

"Poor Mr. Wilford !" she said, sighing ; and she filled up the kettle, for all the rummers wanted replenishing.

CHAPTER II.

OLD MR. HADFIELD OF THE GRANGE.

MR. WILFORD was soon stopping in front of the porch over which was carven the crest of the Hadfields—the dove standing on the serpent; motto—“Soyez sage et simple.”

A young man, not unlike the traveller in face and figure, except that he was much smaller and slighter, and wore no beard, came hurrying out of the entrance-hall.

“Wilford!” he cried out.

“Steenie!” the traveller answered.

“I’m so glad you’ve come!” And their hands were clasped tightly.

“Does he live still?” asked Wilford, in a strange, hollow voice.

“Yes. It is all one can say of him. He is dreadfully feeble, very dreamy, and dazed. He is like one in a trance. Yet, he lives.”

“Thank God!” said the elder brother, solemnly. “I hardly dared hope to see him alive. Lord, Steenie, how you’ve grown! Why, you were quite a boy when I went away!”

“You’ve been gone some time, remember, Wil,” and Steenie smiled rather sadly.

“Seven years. Yes, there has been time for change. And you’ve married, haven’t you, Steenie? You’ve got a

wife and children? God bless me, how time flies!"

"You shall see her to-morrow, and the children, too, if you like; they have all retired for the night. Indeed, it was so late, we almost despaired of your coming to-night. I thought you had perhaps stopped at Mowle."

"Indeed, I haven't stopped a minute, Steenie, on the road. The news reached me in Brussels,—I saw the advertisement in the newspaper. I knew it could only refer to me, and I started at once. I haven't slept or tasted food since. Can I see him, Steenie? Will he let me?—now?—at once?"

"I will go up and see. I will ask Mr. Fuller: he is going to stop the night through. He has been most kind. Wait in the library; they shall bring you some refreshment. Be sure you

ask for anything you want. You are at home again now, you know, Wil."

And Stephen Hadfield mounted quickly the wide oaken staircase, so black with age and so polished that it looked as though it were made of ebony.

"At home!" Wilford repeated mechanically, passing his nervous hand over his forehead. There was something of agony in the tone of his voice, as he added: "It has been no home to me for seven long years. It can never be a home to me again."

He tottered to a chair, he sat down, leaning upon the table, and burying his face in his hands. He started up suddenly, for a servant entered with the tray, and he felt ashamed of his emotion being too apparent. He poured some wine into a tumbler, and emptied it at once. A footstep was heard at the

door; another moment and Mr. Fuller stood before Wilford Hadfield.

“My dear boy,” said the doctor, heartily, “how glad I am to see you here again! once more at the Grange, Wilford; that’s how it should be, isn’t it? Yet, how you’ve changed; how your hand burns, too; you’re dreadfully feverish, do you know that? It’s the journey, perhaps, as you say. I should hardly have known you with that great beard, and all that thick long hair.”

Wilford smiled as he tossed back the matted locks from his forehead.

“That’s more like you; I know that smile; I know that grand old action of the head to shake the hair from your forehead. There’s something leonine about it. Many of the Hadfields have had it: especially old Uncle Hugh and my poor friend upstairs. I don’t trace

it in Stephen so much; perhaps it's because I wasn't in attendance at his birth," and the doctor laughed at himself. "He was born in the south, if you remember. They tell me I always think the most of my own children, as I call them. Ah, Wilford, it doesn't seem so very long ago since all the place was rejoicing at your birth. How well I remember it! I was attending on poor Mrs. Hadfield! Lord! it seems only yesterday!"

So the kind-hearted doctor ran on. Was he really garrulous, or was he talking with an object? Doctors are very cunning. It might have been to give time to his patient upstairs. It might have been to accustom Wilford a little more to his position—to calm down his excitement—before the interview between the father and the son should take place. Or did it

arise from that prevalent English practice of keeping back the most important topic of conversation until much preliminary discussion has been disposed of? For it is not only ladies who follow the plan of deferring to the postscript the vital object of their letters. People *will* approach the matter that most interests them, and to which they are burning to come, circuitously and under cover of all sorts of common-places, just as Hamlet and Laertes stamp and wave their foils and attitudinize, losing so much time before they set to the serious business of fighting, upon which both are bent.

The doctor would say very little of old Mr. Hadfield, dying upstairs. He parried all Wilford's eager inquiries.

“He is dozing, at present,” he said. “Yes—it has been a bad attack—a very bad attack; and at his age even the best constitution—and his has been a very good

one—all the Hadfields have had good constitutions—but at a certain age the best constitution in the world can't stand some attacks. He is very weak, but he fights on manfully—wonderful stamina. Each time I think he is sinking, I find that he rouses himself again in a quite surprising way. Yes, you shall see him, by-and-by, never fear; but the slightest inclination to sleep is valuable to him just now, and we mustn't trifle with him in his present state. By-and-by. By-and-by. Why, you look taller than ever. I really think you must have grown!"

How tiresome seems this sort of talk, in answer to the questions of the sick man's friends! Will he live? Will he survive the night? For how many hours is he safe? Will the morning's sun find him yet living, or will it be struggling to pierce through the chinks of closed shutters, and

to gleam in thin lines and fitful patches on the bed where a corpse is stretched out, and the sheet covers a dead man's face? Ask these questions, as they come surging up from a suffering heart, and receive in reply platitudes about stamina and constitution, and time, and quiet, care, and the best advice!

Yet what can the doctor do or say else? He is only a man after all, though a medical man. He is not one of the Parcæ. He is not Atropos the Unchangeable, ruling the end of life. And even supposing that he thinks the worst *has* come to the worst, as people say—that Death's hand is already pressing on the patient's heart, staying its pulsation—is he really bound to tell his thoughts on the instant? Is he not entitled to use his discretion as to the when and where of his revelation? Don't we pay

him to be discreet? So Mr. Fuller elected to talk rather of the living son than of the dying father. It may be that he had reasons for so doing; and it may be, moreover, that those reasons were good ones.

“Seven years ago, Wilford, since you went away. Yes, just seven years. Ah! a sad business—a very sad business indeed!”

“Don’t speak of it now, good friend,” said Wilford, turning away; “not just now, at any rate.”

“I won’t, my boy; I won’t. But we’ve often thought of you—often—wondering what had become of you—what you were doing.”

“And what have I done all the while?” the young man cried, bitterly. “What have I done? No good, you may be sure of that.”

"Hush! hush! don't speak so now. All that's over now, you know. You're home again in your father's house. Bygones are to be bygones now. You were a mere boy when you went away. You are only a young man now. There's a long life before you—a happy one, very likely. Why not?"

Wilford shook his head mournfully.

"But there *is*," the doctor persisted. "I have great hopes of you. I always had great hopes of you. In the old times, don't you remember, you were quite a pet of mine? We used to have great games together. I could never keep you out of the surgery. You were always plaguing me to let you look at the skeleton locked up in the mahogany case. Do you remember that? And my poor wife, what a fright she was in when you got hold of that

case of lancets! You were quite a baby then, in frocks; and she thought you'd cut your poor little hands all to pieces. But you didn't. There's a special providence watching over children, I do believe, or I'm sure a great many more would be blown up with gunpowder, or cut into little pieces with knives and sharp instruments, or be run over, or go tumbling out of window. The things children get doing! It's wonderful!"

So the doctor ran on—a small, spare man, nearly sixty years of age, perhaps, with a handsome, rather bald forehead, and quick, bright blue eyes. His smile was very pleasant, though peculiar, accompanied as it was by a certain declension of the eyebrows always, which imparted to it a piquancy and vivacity that were decidedly attractive. He toyed with his double eye-glass as he spoke,

and his whole manner was very earnest. Perhaps the situation in which he was placed made him seem almost restless during his conversation with Wilford.

“And your own children, doctor, are they well? Little sunny-headed things, how well I remember them and the romps there used to be with them on the lawn at the back of your house! How I used to frighten them with telling them there were really live lions in Grilling Park, who would be sure to pounce upon them and eat them up, some day, at two mouthfuls! They declared it wasn’t true, and yet they were always frightened, and took such tight hold of my hand. Such pretty children, too!”

“Thank you,” said the doctor, looking very happy and pleased; “they are very well. But as for children! Time

has been going on with you, and he hasn't been stopping with other people. I'm sure Vi wouldn't let you call her a child, and I don't think Madge would either; or perhaps I ought to say, rather, that I am sure Madge wouldn't, and I have grave doubts about Vi; for I believe it is always the youngest who are the most peremptory on these matters; and little Madge is now—let me see—she must be just fifteen—at least I think so; but you know that fathers never can remember their children's ages. But here I am talking, and keeping you from eating, and you must be as hungry as a hunter—quite faint, I should say rather, for want of food. You look very white. Always so? No, surely not; it must be the cold. The Grange is a dreadfully cold place. Gets worse and worse, I think, every winter. Per-

haps it is that I feel it more and more from growing older. Come close to the fire and try and eat something, do. No, I wouldn't drink all that wine without eating something, if I were you. That's a very strong sherry —a good sound wine; but I think some of this Madeira would be better for you. I'm not at all sure that the best thing you could do wouldn't be to go and get between the sheets at once, and try and have a good night's rest."

"I don't like his looks at all," he muttered to himself. Just then the housekeeper entered, making a profound curtsey to Mr. Wilford. He did not appear to notice her: he was gazing sternly into the fire, profoundly abstracted. She approached softly, and said something in a low voice to the doctor.

“Very well,” he said, “I’ll see to it:” and she left the room. The doctor’s manner changed. He abandoned the light, pleasant tone in which he had until then been speaking. He looked very serious now. He placed his hand upon Wilford’s shoulder.

“Your father will see you,” he said. Wilford rose up, trembling.

“One moment,” said the doctor, staying him as he moved towards the door. “I will go in with you. But I should caution you: Mr. Hadfield is very weak, yet at times he is almost violent; his strength seems to return to him for the occasion, and he permits himself to be strangely moved and excited. These paroxysms—for so I may call them—are very bad for him. You know something of his temper of old. Age and illness have not bettered it. Be tem-

perate with him, my dear boy. Don't irritate him. Say as little as possible. For your own sake as well as his, don't offend him again—don't do that. Be careful, my dear boy. God prosper you!"

The doctor shook hands with him affectionately.

"He is my father," said Wilford, in a husky voice. "I will remember that now, though I forgot it before. How my heart beats! Let us go to his room."

They ascended the staircase, and stopped before the door of a room on the first floor—the room in which old Mr. Hadfield, of the Grange, lay dying.

It was but dimly lighted by the fire burning rather low in the grate, and a lamp on the table at the side of the invalid's bed, but placed so that his eyes should not be offended by its glare,

and so that the shadow of the curtains should fall upon his face. Between the bed and the fire-place, Stephen Hadfield was seated on a low chair with a large book in his hands, open at a particular place, as though he had been reading to his father.

The housekeeper was at the door to admit the visitors; another woman, who had been acting as nurse, was bending drowsily over the fire. The room was very large, with carved ceiling and heavy cornices. Every now and then, as a flame flickered in the grate, you could trace the vague outlines of a large allegorical painting, dimmed and clouded by years, amongst the raised ornaments of the ceiling. The colours were not very strong now, the drawing in places was quite undefinable, and much of the gilding of

the portions in relief was very dull and black.

On a high, carved, four-post bedstead, with heavy, dull crimson hangings, old Mr. Hadfield was stretched at length, breathing heavily. He had been a tall man you could see at once, and handsome, too ; his son Wilford's resemblance to him was remarkable ; but he looked very gaunt and grim, and grizzly now, he was so wasted by age and illness. He had the fierce black eyes of Wilford, and falling on his forehead like thick hair, save that it was perfectly white in his case. His cheeks were dreadfully sunken, while there was something unnatural about the brilliancy of his eyes, flashing from such hollow sockets. He stared steadily at his son, scrutinizing him as he entered with the doctor.

The poor old man was painfully weak, it could be seen at a glance; once he tried to raise himself up in the bed, but he sank back after an ineffectual effort. Wilford for the first few moments, unaccustomed to the low light of the room, could not clearly perceive his father, shadowed by the curtains of the bed. As yet, neither had spoken. The room was very still; you could hear the tickings of the watch in the pocket over the old man's head, above even his heavy breathing—above the trembling of the embers on the hearth—above the gasping which Wilford experienced consequent upon the terribly quick beating of his heart. He was about to address his father, but the doctor's hand on his arm checked him. The eyes of the old man turned from his first to his second son.

"Go on, Steenie," he said, in a low hoarse voice. "Begin where I told you."

And Stephen Hadfield, much moved and in rather broken tones, commenced to read:

—“gathered all together and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance in riotous living.”

He was reading from the New Testament—the story of the Prodigal Son. He continued for some verses further.

“Stop!” said the old man. Then he turned to Wilford, and cried, almost savagely: “Now, Prodigal! what have you to say?”

Wilford came to the side of the bed. There was a look of deep suffering in his face. He sank upon his knees with a piteous moan.

“Forgive me, father!” and he tried

to take the old man's hand. It was drawn away abruptly.

Mr. Hadfield, however, glanced at his second son, Stephen. There seemed to be an understanding between them, as to what was next to be done. Stephen laid down the Book on the bed, and placed a hand-bell within his father's reach, and then, motioning all to leave the room, quitted it himself, closing the door upon old Mr. Hadfield and his eldest son.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRODIGAL.

THE old man shook very much, yet it seemed that he did so almost as much from anger as from age or illness. Indeed, he appeared to have acquired a sudden accession of force to enable him to play the part he had probably proposed to himself, in the interview with his son. The paroxysms of temper in which, as Mr. Fuller had hinted, the invalid occasionally per-

mitted himself to indulge during his illness, might be taken as so many evidences of strength—purchased, however at the cost of much subsequent prostration and exhaustion. But he had now nerved himself for an encounter which he had looked forward to as likely to be one of violence and passion; he was prepared to meet a son who had treated him with, as he conceived, the most rebellious defiance, and he appeared determined to re-assert his authority, and punish a grievous and shameful offence with all the severity that was possible, without regard to the sufferings his exertions might subsequently entail upon himself.

“Don’t come whining to me like a dog that’s been kicked,” he said, in a hard, jeering voice.

Wilford drew himself up, with a pained

look in his face and his lips quivering ; he lowered his eyes, and drew back a step or two. While evidently hurt and surprised at his father's manner, he seemed anxious, as far as possible, to give no further cause of offence.

“Why have you come?” Mr. Hadfield asked, sternly, bringing his clenched hand down with a thump upon the book Stephen had left upon the bed.

“Did you not send for me?”

“I bade them tell you that I was very ill, and that if you would see me again alive you had better come soon.”

He spoke loudly and angrily.

“Therefore I have come, father.”

He seemed bewildered at the old man's words and manner.

“For no other reason?”

“Forgive me!” And he came again to the bed, and tried to take his father's

hand. It was again snatched from him. "Father! have some pity," he went on. "What am I to do or say? Tell me—only tell me! Indeed, indeed, I would do all you would have me!"

Mr. Hadfield glared upon him with fierce, wild eyes.

"Don't whine," he said. "Be true to your nature. You were bold enough years back; there was no hypocrisy then—no canting nor shamming, but open, shameless speaking. It was bad enough, but it was better than lying. Do you remember it?"

"I do, father."

"Seven years ago! Open that Bible—look at the beginning of it—turn to the fly-leaves—an old, old book that has been years and years in this family—that contains many, many entries of the Births and Marriages and Deaths of the

Hadfields. Stop there at that blotted page—there! That was blotted out by me, with this right hand, seven years ago, one fine November morning when you turned your back upon your father's house. See, there is a date affixed to it and my signature. Your name was written there and the date of your birth—‘Wilford George Saxon Carew Hadfield,’ born so and so. Not a letter is now traceable; I blotted it out when I cast you off as a son of mine; I placed my hand upon the book, and I cursed you with all my heart and soul; I kissed the book and prayed to Heaven that my curse might be brought to pass. Do you hear, sir?”

Wilford hid his death-white face in his hands. Mr. Hadfield paused for breath a few minutes, and then resumed:

“Seven years have passed, and you

have come back again—to see me, it may be, for the last time. I am an old man. If I recover from this sickness—and the doctors hint that it is likely to go hard with me—but if I recover now, I can expect to live in any case but a short time longer. The Hadfields have been a long-lived race; but I feel that I am very old and weak and broken. I am not the man I have been, I am not long for this world—I know it, and I don't shrink from the knowledge. Well, you are here—come back like the Prodigal of whom Steenie read to us to-night. Have you come back now as *he* did? Are you penitent as he was? Have you suffered as he had?"

"Father, I am very, very sorry—"

"Bah!"

"Tell me what you would have me do or say."

“Tell me how these seven years have been passed. In sorrow? in suffering? or in the most shameful profligacy and sin?”

Wilford cowered and turned away.

“Seven years! A long apprenticeship to serve with the devil! You may well be tired of the service—glad to come back to England, to Grilling Abbots, for a change. Perhaps, too, your money has run out—your poor mother’s money. She had power to will it to you, and she did will it to you. I could not have stayed it, or I would. It was yours when you were twenty-one. You have had it—yes—and spent it. Has it all gone?”

But his son made no answer.

The old man gave a wild shriek of laughter.

“I knew it.” And then he added,

with a triumphant air of discovery, “Another reason for coming back. Your money spent, you were pressed to come back home to try and get more—to wring it from me by whining, or to borrow it of Steenie. Borrow? —another word for robbing the poor lad’s wife and children. Wasn’t this so?”

“Father,” said Wilford, solemnly, “I came back because I learnt that you were very ill—because there was a fear that if I was ever to receive your pardon it could only be now. I am penitent, and pained, and very, very sorry. Do I deserve the harsh treatment I still receive at your hands? Granted that I have deserved punishment for the past, is it to be without end? For years I have been severed from my home. Is *that* to count for nothing? If I come back like the

Prodigal, am I received as he was? Was *his* penitence spurned? Was a deaf ear turned to *his* prayer? There is a duty owing from the child to the parent: is there none from the parent to the child?"

"I like this better than whining," the old man said, in calmer tones. "There is a flavour about this of the old insolence, and daring, and shamelessness. It is infamous; but it is truthful, it is real. The hypocrite doesn't suit you. You don't play the part well. The frank scoundrel is more adapted to your kind of ability. And it requires so very little talent; it is so very easy to do. But I thank you for throwing off the mask."

"These are very cruel words, father. Heaven knows I never thought to hear such from you again."

“Or you’d not have come back? No, you looked to be feted and caressed—for the church bells to be set ringing, the tar barrels lighted, and oxen roasted whole. That was the plan you had laid out for yourself. To each of us you had assigned our parts of homage and affection and regard for you. We were to welcome with acclamations one who had brought shame and dis-honour upon our race.”

Wilford darted a strange glance of suspicion at his father. He bit his lips till the blood came, but he said nothing.

“To be greeted like the Prodigal on his return, you must have suffered like the Prodigal. Have you been in want? Have you been compelled to toil for your bread? Have you herded with swine, and been fain to eat of their

husks? Have you been like to perish with hunger? Is it for these reasons you come home, poor and penitent, to be as a hired servant, and to have bread enough and to spare? No! You have lived proudly and defiantly enough—the first part of the Prodigal's career, not the second. You have wasted your substance, you have rioted, you have spared yourself no enjoyment, your life has been a list of pleasures. Profligate, gambler, yes, and—I see it now, I did not know it before, I own—*drunkard!*”

Wilford hid his trembling hands in his bosom. With his eyes bent on the ground he spoke in a low, faltering voice.

“I desire to make no excuse for myself. It may be that my life has been thoughtless, wasteful, wicked. I will urge no apologies for my conduct,

though perhaps some could be found, and valid ones. Let me only say that when I learnt of your illness, it was my first impulse to return to England, with deep sorrow in my heart, with great contrition for the past, with earnest desire to amend in the future, and to deserve that pardon which I did hope you would be prevailed upon to extend to me. It seems good to you to believe that the seven years, the years of my separation from home, have been happily spent by me. Pray be undeceived. I have been most miserable; more truly wretched than I at one time believed was possible for man to be. If I have thus been driven again to madness, and folly, and sin, it has been indeed in a futile quest of forgetfulness. It seems to me that there are things even harder to bear than want

of bread ; that some pangs are more painful than even the pangs of hunger. Father, if you ever believed me, believe me now ; if you ever cared for me, for God's sake open your heart to me now—pity and forgive me ! ”

There was something very plaintive about the tone of his voice as he said these words and sank on his knees at the bedside. The old man was visibly moved by them, almost in spite of himself ; and yet he seemed to be possessed by a craving for some further acts of conciliation and humiliation on the young man's part. How he had pampered, and humoured, and indulged in every way his eldest son as a child ! How cold, and harsh, and cruel he was to him as a man ! How he seemed to enjoy keeping him at arm's length, torturing him with taunts and accusa-

tions! Perhaps he knew that something of his own nature was in the heart of his son—the same proneness to violence and passion, the same unbending pride and fatal obstinacy. He had summoned the young man to his bedside, be it said, with the full intention of ultimately pardoning him, and restoring him to his place in the household as the next inheritor of the Hadfield estates. Yet he had determined that before this should be, a severe lesson should be read, his son's imperious temper should be humbled, his obstinacy should be conquered. A man of strong affection really, Mr. Hadfield had yet succeeded in making this entirely subservient to his pride, and to his resolution to assert himself as the head of his family. He was bent upon subduing utterly his son. Much Wilford had already done—

more, perhaps, than he was himself aware of—towards pacifying his father's wrath, towards winning back his favour. But the more the old man was able to exact, the more the love of exaction seemed to grow upon him. He could fix no limit to his desire for the conquest of his son. The more he felt his power, the more he was inclined to exert it. Each time the thought came to him that now, surely, he might stay his hand, and extend his forgiveness, came a half crazy longing for further dominion over, for further concession on the part of his rebellious son. His conduct was very wanton, cruelly vindictive. His excuse must be that in the end he had pre-arranged to yield, and was only waiting for what he imagined would be the ripe moment for his so doing.

“When I blotted your name out of

that book, when I cursed you heart and soul, and prayed that you might feel my curse, and that these eyes might never look upon your face again, I made a new will. These estates are not entailed, as you know; if you have raised funds, therefore, expecting after my death to get money to pay back what you have borrowed, you have aided indirectly in a fraud. Money of mine will never find its way into the pockets of your creditors. I made a new will, by which I bequeathed all the property I have in the world to my second son, Stephen, and his children. On my death a small annuity will become payable to you under your mother's settlement—my interest in it ceases with my life—but no halfpenny of mine will accrue to you. Stephen will become the owner of the Grange, and of all the Haddfield estates. As he never has brought,

so I am sure he never will bring dis-honour upon my name ; his children will inherit after him, and his children's children. To you, and to child of yours, no single acre of this land will ever belong. As your name is blotted out of that Bible, so is it blotted out of my will. So it will die out of men's recollection, and be as though it had never been. You have lived disgracefully : you will die obscurely and forgotten. So much as to my will and its provisions. But now you have come back—you are here—penitent, you say, and suffering ; a roué, a gambler, but still penitent and suffering. Let me ask you, then, what you have done during your long absence from home that I should remove my curse, that I should re-write your name in that book, that I should re-invest you in your position as my eldest son and lawful heir, that I

should make a new will? I am still strong enough—a few words on a scrap of paper would do it. Tell me, what have you done?"

Wilford moved uneasily. He grew very hopeless and wretched. He seemed quite crushed by the unexpected obduracy of his father. He had looked for a different reception. Whatever wrong he had done in the past, he had hurried home full of affection for his father—very sad and broken, and yet reliant upon a few kind words to heal the animosity which had existed between them for so long, and to enable them to part with softened feelings, though it might be on the brink of the grave. Dreadfully weak and fatigued, with nerves all unstrung, his brain in a whirl, and the tears starting on the instant to his eyes, he had been admitted to the presence of the invalid. Seeking for pity,

and tenderness, and pardon, he was entirely unprepared for the reception he encountered. He found his father stern, ironic, almost savage, full of taunts and charges, irritating, heartless, unbearable. He struggled as long as he could. He had bent before his father. He had humbled himself genuinely. He had asked for pardon with deep penitence and sincerity. He had done more than at one time he would have deemed possible. He felt broken and crushed. And yet his father showed no sign of relenting.

“Tell me, what have you done?”

There was no hint of softening or conciliation in the tone in which the words were spoken. There seemed rather to lurk in the question some new disregard of his feelings—some new desire to wound and humble him further. With every wish to restrain himself, it seemed to him at last

to be useless, hopeless, further to prolong a scene so eminently painful. He thought that he had done all that was possible for son to do: that he would now go his way; for indeed he could bear to stay no longer.

“Tell me what have you done that I should do all this?” the old man repeated.

“Nothing!” answered the son, hoarsely.

“Nothing!” the old man repeated, angrily.

“Father,” he said, with some abruptness, “let the estates go. Let Steenie have them. Let him be your heir, and take his place as head of the house. Let his children come after him, and still be preferred to me. It will matter little enough; there will never be child of mine to inherit anything,” he went on, bitterly. “Let the money go too. It was not *that* brought me home. It was not care for such things sent me on my knees just

now. I asked your pardon, humbly, honestly. You withhold it from me. Be it so. Let God's will be done. I would have it otherwise, if I could. For curses, they are acts of Heaven, not words of man. Had I been censured more when I was a child, and less when I became a man, perhaps things would have turned out better, and I should not have had to sue here for pardon, or have had it harshly withheld from me. Indeed, father, you have done me wrong, not crediting me when I confessed my sin and implored you to forgive me. Can I do more? I come to you with my heart in my hands, and you fling it far away from you, and will have none of it. At least it will be something—not much, but something—to know that I arrived in time to see you—that I knelt to you—though all was in vain. I never thought to be speaking

thus, but there seems to be now no help for it."

The old man raised himself in his bed, trembling violently. Unconsciously, Wilford had undone all the good his previous demeanour had wrought on his behalf.

"So you defy me, then!" cried Mr. Hadfield, passionately. "I may do my worst, may I? Curse or no curse. You care little. Will or no will. I thank you for this. I like openness and outspeaking. I am glad you have thrown off all disguise. You are the same shameless, unfilial Wilford Hadfield who went away from here seven years ago; but worse, because you are older. I have to thank you for letting me know this in good time —in time to prevent me doing an act of gross folly and injustice. See here, sir," and the old man opened the Bible, and took from it a sheet of paper, "I *had* made a

new will. I *had* purposed to restore to you the position to which you were born. I *had* again made you my heir—the next owner of the Hadfield lands. You have spoken in time. You have shown yourself in your real colours in time. Thus I send you back again to beggary, then ; thus I cancel my will—thus—thus,” and as he spoke, with trembling hands, he tore the paper to shreds. “Thus I make Stephen my heir, and bequeath all to him. Now, sir, go forth—stranger, outcast, beggar ; let me never set eyes on you again. Let me——”

He flung the crumpled fragments of paper into the face of his son ; he whirled his thin, withered arms in the air, as though endeavouring to invoke some new curse upon his first-born child ; but his voice failed him : his passion prevented what he said from being

either articulate or audible. He seized the hand-bell at his side, and rang it furiously. He sank back on his pillows, panting for breath.

Wilford hurried from the room. In the corridor he met his brother and the doctor.

“Go in at once, for God’s sake!” he said. “My father is very ill. He needs assistance, and at once.”

Mr. Fuller entered the sick room.

“He has forgiven you? All has ended well?” Stephen asked.

“No,” answered Wilford with anguish. “He has not forgiven me. He will never forgive me now. Perhaps it had been better if I had never come back. Heaven knows I did it for the best.”

“But he will change again, Wilford, soon. This illness affects him,

makes him wild and angry, mad almost at times. By-and-by he will see you again."

"He will never see me again : he has cursed me anew. I am no more his son. I am nothing to him more ! By-and-by ? He will be dead, and he will not have forgiven me."

He tottered back : but for the support of the wall he would have fallen.

"Let me go hence," he said, "into the open air. I cannot breathe in this house. How weak I am !"

His limbs trembling beneath him, he passed down the staircase, and went forth into the night, bitterly cold, and ghostly white from the snow thick upon the ground.

Stephen joined the doctor in his father's room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOCTOR'S DAUGHTERS.

IT is to be presumed that Grilling Abbots ranked as a town rather than as a village, for the reason that every Wednesday throughout the year about three old women took it into their heads to assemble with their fruit-stalls in what was called the High Street—apparently because there was no other street of any kind whatever—and there hold what they chose to term a

market. Considered as a select and limited open-air, day-light *conversazione*, no doubt this weekly meeting was as pleasant to the few concerned in it as it was certainly harmless to the rest of the world; but viewed in the light of an affair attended with financial results of any importance whatever, it must be pronounced a decided failure. Nevertheless the fact of this pseudo weekly market being held at Grilling Abbots was duly registered in almanacks and chronicled in gazetteers, and all the inhabitants clung to it as an ancient and honourable institution that somehow, though precisely in what way no one could finally settle, enhanced the value of and gave consequence to their town. A rather wide street of straggling houses, some of the fine old red tone of years and years ago, others of new and pale brick, in colour like the

crust of a slack-baked loaf; an old Norman church some hundred yards in the rear of the High Street, its walls of the rugged, crumbly texture of the rind of a full-ripe Stilton cheese, and wonderfully freckled and variegated with alternate patches of moss and lichen: in the church-yard, shading quite a large group of graves, a yew tree, so dense that it looked quite black in the distance, and its straight, wide-spreading branches drew broad, dark, opaque streaks across the view of the church: the George Inn “with good accommodation,” &c., where Mr. Wilford Hadfield paused while the horses were changed on his journey to the Grange: the new Gothic school-house, built on part of the site of the old White Hart Hotel, which had been closed for so long—(the last proprietor committed suicide on the day the last stage-coach went through the

town for the last time : Grilling Abbots had been a famous place, and the White Hart its most noted hostel in the old pre-railroad times, when a score of coaches rattled daily along the High Street)—the Rectory, completely covered with ivy, like an old warrior coated with chain-mail ; the pump, the butcher's, the baker's, the blacksmith's—sum up these items, and you have Grilling Abbots, save that there has to be noted, in addition, a small white house—a little aloof from the town—standing in its own garden grounds, on the road to the Grange, and being the residence of Mr. Fuller, surgeon, &c.

There was no name to the house apparently ; it was not known as Prospect, or Woodbine, or Clematis Cottage or Villa. Yet not a soul in the town but could point out the Doctor's, the pretty white building at the end of the town—where Mr. Fuller.

had lived, man and boy, these ever so many years.

A very pretty house—or cottage rather; the Doctor always called it a cottage; and, certainly, as its tenant, he ought to have known, if anybody ought, what to call it—with a thickly-thatched roof—Uplandshire is a great county for thatched roofs—the thatch packed very even and tight, and cut off so sharply at the ends that it looked like an agriculturist's closely-clipped locks, the sharp line the roof took over each window, resembling very much the curve of Hodge's hair over his ears; a pretty garden too, daintily kept in summer time, with a lawn like a velvet-pile carpet, standard roses thickly studded with buds, neat sharp-edged beds, brilliant with thickly growing verbena, and a honeysuckle trailing itself over the porch, clinging with languid gracefulness to the neat lattice-work. But

this is the summer view of the place: we have winter now. The lawn is covered with snow, which paints white lines on every tree-bow, and sprinkles every hedge with crystal powder. Snow everywhere. The earth so bright with it that the sky looks quite a dull leaden grey by contrast, and the tree-trunks jet-black. The low-roofed rooms in the Doctor's cottage are quite lit up by the snow outside, which mounts upon the window-sills and clings to the sashes, till they look as though they were wadded with swan's-down to keep the cold out.

The house is more commodious than might at a first view be supposed. The drawing-room, though the ceiling is low, is quite a spacious apartment, and is built out at the back with a bow window, hung now with warm curtains, replacing the white muslin draperies of summer. Sing-

ing and flapping his wings furiously every now and then to keep himself warm probably, and pecking at his sugar as though he were really fighting with it on the ground of some long-standing animosity—a pretty bird, but blessed with a temper notwithstanding the good-natured looks of his black beads of eyes, Miss Madge Fuller's canary, dwells in an ornamental wire cage, something of a pagoda pattern (a mistake in costume as it were, for the bird didn't come from China), decorating the window. His mistress—whose affection is a little boisterous at times, and rather terrifies its object—has considerately supplied him with tepid water for his bath during the cold season. He has really a comfortable time of it, that bird, supposing him to have no strong notions on the subject of liberty, and that he holds that lacquered wires do not after

all make a cage, for he is earnestly cared for and tended by the whole household ; his appetite and tastes are considered, he has not to go foraging about like the vagabond birds outside, he has his food in regularly from his own greengrocer's, he sees plenty of society, he is often covered with kisses from the red lips of pretty Miss Madge (perhaps she does a little overdo this, so far as comfort is concerned), and in return, it is only expected of him that he will not sing too violently when company are in the room, nor fling about too many of his seeds on the drawing-room carpet—both which expectations, however, it may be said, he is continually disappointing.

A comfortable fire burns in the grate. Before it Miss Violet Fuller sits very busy indeed, sewing. It looks very much as though she were engaged on one of a

new set of shirts for the Doctor, and bent upon putting the most minute work that ever was seen into his wristbands. Miss Violet is the housekeeper of the establishment, and has filled that position admirably, as every one in Grilling Abbots will certify, ever since the death of the Doctor's wife, many years ago.

Miss Violet is rather above the middle height; a slight lithe figure; very graceful in movement, and with a certain charming repose about her manner. She has large, grey, luminous eyes, beautifully shadowed and intensified in hue by their long overhanging lashes, a complexion radiantly fair, features delicately formed, and profuse coils of silky brown hair. Those intent upon the smaller traits of beauty would delight to note the exquisite lines of her mouth, and chin, and neck. As a rule, I think

people are apt to overlook how really important are these matters in their bearing upon general perfectness of form. Indeed it seems to be sufficient for a woman to have big eyes, a respectable nose, and to make her hair shine with bear's-grease, for her to be adored as a beauty by a sufficiently large circle of admirers. In any discussion concerning the daughters of Doctor Fuller amongst the dwellers in Grilling Abbots, it may be mentioned that Miss Violet was always distinguished as the "pretty Miss Fuller," a distinction creditable to the perceptions of the Grilling Abbots people, although a decided slight appeared to be conveyed by it to the not trifling attractions of Miss Madge, the younger sister.

It is true that Miss Madge was only just emerging from that rather trying

period of life, so far as beauty is concerned, when there is a decided inclination about the arms and legs, and the extremities, to develop themselves greatly and independently, regardless of symmetry, or the general proportions of the body. I have heard rude young men define this state by the term "leggy;" and the appellation is apposite, perhaps, though certainly unrefined. Miss Madge had been suffering from the economy of growth, and was only just recovering from this transitional stage of life. A certain angularity still clung to her form; her feet—but the appearance of feet, after all, is a matter that rests very much with the bootmaker—were not small, while her hands were decidedly large, and not white. She was little more than fifteen, and perhaps it would be premature to say that she had already

attained her full height. Yet it must be admitted that Madge had a very fair share of personal charms, and these quite apart from the witchery of her perpetual merriment; and her laugh, if a little loud, was yet most perfectly musical; it was a laugh with the loud pedal down, but it was as irresistible as it was harmonious. Her features were irregular; so much could be seen at a glance. But after all, beauty is not a mere matter of lines and angles, to be demonstrated like a mathematical proposition; it is the expression of a face that charms, not the accuracy of its drawing. Surely then the best beauty is expression, and here Madge had a triumph: for it was not possible to withstand the allurements of that good, glad, frank expression, brilliant in its health and heart. After this there can be no harm in conceding

that her nose was distinctly of a turn-up pattern; not that such a form of nose is in any way unprepossessing, or has by any means had justice done to it; but it is a nose under a kind of ban of generally recognized disapproval; it is a nose with a bad name, in fact. I am afraid that much the same sort of view must be taken in regard to Madge's hair, which was that of a glorious red hue—decidedly red, mind; no evasion under the name of yellow, or tawny, or auburn; but of that uncompromising red the world has been somehow coerced to agree that it does not like. But than those large wide-open eyes, so superbly blue, quite like the finest jewels in hue and brightness, though they could melt, and glow, and vary as no jewel can; those grand arching eyebrows, those ripe-red lips, that pearly set of

teeth, and that transparent complexion; how white her neck, what a mottled rosiness upon her cheeks! She might not be the pretty Miss Fuller, but I should like to see the creature equal to the criminal audacity of describing her as the ugly one. Let us be content with saying that, conventionally considered, she was less beautiful than Violet—that's all: we will make no further concessions to the disadvantage of our Madge.

Is it to be marvelled at that Mr. Fuller was very proud and very fond of the two charming daughters his dead wife had bequeathed to his love and care? We may go, indeed, further. Was it strange that the whole of Grilling Abbots was proud and fond of the Miss Fullers—of Violet and Madge?

Madge is busy drawing from a litho-

graphed landscape—shall we say by dexterous Mr. Harding? Madge has not great art-talent, though she fancies she has, and her good father—who honestly knows no more about drawing and painting than about whale-fishing—heartily backs the opinion of his younger child. Violet has considerable taste and skill. Those framed chalk heads (after Julien) on the wall of the drawing-room are from her hand; so also is that portrait of Madge, taken five years ago—you may note that her eyes were not much smaller then; and a tolerable likeness of the Doctor—his cravat and collars limned, perhaps, with superfluous accuracy—sketched about the same time: he was not quite so bald then, and his face perhaps a little fuller. But these works are highly creditable specimens of amateur talent, especially when it is borne in mind that the opportunities of obtaining

art-instruction in the heart of Uplandshire are not too numerous. And what does Grilling Abbots know concerning the Fine Arts? Why, bless the place! it has hardly ever even set eyes on a painting (except the sign-board of the George), or a painter either. It is true a travelling photographer, in a cheap-jack sort of van, once stopped a whole week in the place—in the paddock at the back of the blacksmith's, and left behind him reminiscences of his sojourn in the shape of scientific caricatures of the inhabitants (collodion on glass) of the most fearful character that ever were seen. But he, like some brothers of his craft whom I and others have met, was not an artist—emphatically not.

Madge was a very expeditious draughts-woman; she did not pause to put too much thought into her work; she plied

her pencil at a furious pace ; she used her india-rubber every now and then determinedly, with a strong wrist, as though she would quite as soon as not work her way through the shiny cardboard, and come out on the other side ; she was prone to strong effects produced by the free use of a BB pencil ; perhaps much of her “handling,” as the painters call it, was as remarkable for its *abandon* as for any artistic quality ; and with vigour and dash she sought to supply the place of knowledge and genuine worth. Fairly speaking, however, the works of Miss Madge Fuller, with all their defects of scribble and smudge, had merits which would have received unequivocating homage in numerous family circles. I have known many worse productions pronounced to be “wonderfully clever” by most reputable people, particularly when the works in

question happened to be achieved by any of the offsprings of those reputable people.

The younger Miss Fuller talked when she worked—in fact she talked when she played, too,—she was always talking.

“I say, Vi, I wonder how much longer papa will be? He promised me faithfully last night that he would come in very soon after breakfast—very soon, he said—and you know it’s past twelve now. I’m sure it is, because I feel so hungry. I wish lunch would come in, don’t you, Vi? Oh, you’re never hungry! How cold my hands are, I can hardly hold my pencil. But I’m getting on capitally with this drawing; I shall finish it this morning,” [scribble, scribble, scribble]. “I’m putting in the water now, Vi. Oh, lor’! I’ve left no room for the boat, the darling little boat, with the tiny little man in it” [rub, rub,

rub]. “Oh, how I’ve smudged it ! What do you think he’s doing in that boat, Vi? Fishing? Ah! I suppose he is. Do you know I think it’s quite a shame those people at the Grange keeping papa all this time? It is so selfish and inconsiderate. Don’t you think so, Vi? Oh! you never will abuse people properly—you won’t! you always make excuses for them. I do wish papa would come home. Oh! there, now, I’ve broken my pencil. Where’s my knife?” [cut, cut, cut].

“You know, Madge, poor old Mr. Hadfield is very ill indeed, and of course papa felt bound to stay with him. The family were so anxious that he should, and they’ve been always such good, kind friends of ours. What could papa do?”

“Oh!” but they’ll tire the poor dear

man to death ; besides I want him to help me make a slide in the garden. He said he would, if the frost lasted. What a splendid slide that was in the garden last Christmas ! Do you remember it, Vi ? ”

“ I am afraid, Madge, your slide will tire papa even more than his sitting up with poor Mr. Hadfield.”

“ Lor’ , so it will ! Do you know I should never have thought of that, Vi ! I wish I had your brains.”

“ I wish papa would come home : he’s been sent for twice this morning to see old Mrs. Gardiner, who’s had another fit.”

“ Then he’ll have to go out again directly he comes in ! What a shame ! What does that stupid old woman mean by falling ill again ? I declare she’s always having fits.”

“For shame, Madge ! You forget the damson-cheeses the old woman gave you a little while ago.”

“Ah ! bless the dear old soul, weren’t they nice ? Oh, Vi ! I wish you’d come and do some of this tree for me. Do, there’s a darling ! You do trees so splendidly, Vi, and this is such a horrid hard one. What’s it meant for ? A willow, isn’t it ? I thought it was. I wish I could draw like you, Vi—you’ve got such a neat sort of way with you—you make the drawing exactly like the copy—somehow, I never can. Oh ! how I’ve blacked my fingers—just look ! Thank you, you darling duck of a Vi !”

And Miss Madge threw her arms round her sister, and kissed her vehemently. Violet released herself, laughing, from this outburst of affection and gratitude.

“What a rough creature you are, Madge! There’s my hair down, and my collar crumpled—you hug one like a bear.”

“Ah, Vi! you’re such a calm, sedate duck, I can’t help it. I suppose I am rough. I think I ought to have been a boy. Do you know I should like nothing better than to go out now and have a game of snow-balls, only” (and Madge twists her red lips about in a droll way) “I suppose it wouldn’t be quite lady-like and proper, would it?”

“Well, perhaps, not quite,” says Miss Violet, laughing; “though I daresay, if you put on your bonnet, and go round to the Laurels, you’ll find Tommy Eastwood very happy to play at snow-balls with you as long as you like.”

Madge blushes a superb crimson. How it sets off her brilliant blue eyes!

“Oh, you wicked girl! How dare you talk in that way? I declare you’re as bad as papa! He’s always teasing me about that wretched little Tommy Eastwood. I won’t have it! What do I care about him, I should like to know?”

“Well, Madge, you know you’ve been taking all those pains with that drawing entirely on his account.”

“I haven’t! As it happens, I’m going to give this drawing to Aunt Mary. I have long promised it to her—so there you’re wrong for once, Vi.”

“Why, Madge, I heard you promise it to Tommy Eastwood!”

“Oh, you wicked story-steller! He asked me for it, but I didn’t say that I’d give it to him, did I? What do I care for him? Why, my dear Vi, he’s

a schoolboy—he wears jackets, and he's *so* short for his age."

"Well, Madge, he'll grow, you know," and Violet seems to enjoy teasing Miss Madge, "and love will soon make you forget his jackets. Then, think what a beautiful work-box he gave you—a most useful present, I must say, considering the enormous amount of work you get through."

"What a tease you are, Vi. I didn't think you could be so spiteful. As if I cared for a Tommy Eastwood! My dear, you make a great mistake. When I love, it shall be a darling at least six feet high, with such pets of mustachios, and sweet black eyes, and lovely curly dark hair."

"Like the figure in the hairdresser's shop at Mowle."

"Yes," says Madge, quite simply;

“only handsomer if possible. Hark at that duck of a canary-bird—how he always chimes in when we begin to talk. Sweet! sweet! sweet! Yes; my own darling dickie duckie canary cherub!”

And the young lady rattled off into a long oration greatly affectionate, and purely nonsensical, addressed to her bird. Suddenly she starts up.

“Here comes my darling papa!”

“How are you, Vi?”—[kiss, kiss].

“How are you, Baby Madge?—[Kiss, kiss, kiss, and many more too numerous to set out. It seemed as though she would never let him go]. “How cold, isn’t it? Mind and keep up good fires. Madge, darling, run and fetch a hand-kerchief from my room.

Madge darted off on the errand. Then Mr. Fuller’s manner changed; he turned to Vi, and said in a solemn voice:

“It’s all over. The poor old man died quite painlessly at nine o’clock this morning.”

CHAPTER V.

THE PASSING BELL.

“AND his son? Mr. Wilford arrived in time? All was made up between them?” Violet asked, with anxiety.

The doctor shook his head mournfully.

“Poor Mr. Wilford!” she went on. “How sad this will make him! Surely he deserved to be forgiven. Surely his long absence from home was sufficient atonement for all his early faults and misdeeds. But perhaps he did not arrive in time?”

“They met,” said Mr. Fuller; “it may be that it would have been better if they had not. I never thought the old man would have been so hard with him. I really believed, in spite of all he said beforehand, that he would relent when he saw his son. I am sure the sight of him was enough to soften any one. Poor Wilford!”

“Has he changed much since he went away? Is he ill?”

“I never saw any man so altered. You recollect how gay, and handsome, and frank he was seven years ago? You were quite a child, Vi, then, but still I think you must remember him. I know he was very good and kind to you children—very fond of you—always ready to romp with you; why, he gave Madge almost her first doll, you remember. Poor fellow! what trouble he took

about it, sending up to London expressly for it! Now he looks years and years older, so thin and gaunt, all his old bright manner gone. Such a worn, white face, such wild-looking eyes, such long, tangled hair and beard! Poor Wilford! I never saw any one so wrecked, and broken, and wretched."

"He was always a favourite of yours, father."

"He is so still, Vi. I can't help it. I did all I could for him in that dreadful business years ago. I never understood it clearly, but I take for granted that the current story about his quarrel with his father was the true one. The old man was furious then, and he remained unforgiving to the last. Yet I am certain the poor boy must have had deep and cruel provocation. He was always violent and headstrong, and very pas-

sionate. Both father and mother spoilt him so when he was a child. Yet I am sure he is of a kind and affectionate nature—I am sure he had in his heart great sorrow, great love for his father."

"Was the old man sensible when they met? Did he know his son?"

"Yes, they were a long time together, holding quite a long conversation; I was in hopes that all was going well between them. Then suddenly Wilford came out of the room, trembling very much, and said his father was taken seriously ill, and that I had better go in to him. I found him scarcely sensible. He had been over-exerting himself, evidently; he was gasping for breath, half-fainting, with a painful palsy upon every limb. God knows what had passed between them! I fear there must have

been a terrible scene. I cannot conceive how the father could have hardened his heart against his son. I feel sure that, intentionally, Wilford could have said nothing to give new offence. Yet something must have made the father very angry. He had intended to relent, it seemed; he had made a new will, much more favourable, I imagine, to his eldest son than the will he has left, and which must of course be acted upon. But he cancelled the new disposition of his property in Wilford's presence: tore it into shreds, and flung it about the room. All chance of reconciliation was then over for ever—indeed, I hardly thought the old man would have lived five minutes; but he has certainly a wonderful constitution. They are a fine family, the Haddocks. Poor old Colonel Hugh was just such another as this one. He rallied

again, and then dozed for some time, but in a very feverish, restless way. I did not like his looks again at all when he woke; he was terribly changed. I was then sure that the worst must be very, very near. Yet he was sensible; with just a slight indication to the contrary when he said to me, in a low voice, 'Somehow I can't rouse my mind, doctor; do I wander when I talk? If I stop, repeat my last word to me, that I may remember what I want to say.' A grand old man! It seemed to me that he was holding his intellects together by mere force of will, as it were. And when he stopped, hesitating, I believe it was quite as much from difficulty of articulation as loss of memory. But he grew weaker; I could see that every minute told upon him. 'Has he gone?' he asked; 'has he gone?' And he seized

my arm. ‘Mr. Wilford?’ I said. ‘Hush! don’t name him,’ he whispered, frowning angrily. Once I thought he was relenting, he was muttering ‘Poor boy! poor boy!’ but he never mentioned his son’s name, and seemed at last to dismiss all thought of him for ever from his mind. It was getting on for dawn now; his pulse was hardly perceptible. He turned to Stephen, and said, ‘Steenie, my *only* son,’ laying stress upon his words; ‘bring them in—Gertrude and the children, it’s time I said good-bye to them.’ Poor Stephen went out, crying dreadfully—he has been a good son to him, has Stephen—and he brought in his wife, and the children, little Agnes and Saxon. But the poor old man was past further speaking; his lips moved, but there was no sound audible. He kissed his daughter-in-law affectionately, and his grandchildren.

Poor little things ! They were lifted up to kiss the dying man, and were dreadfully scared and puzzled at the whole business ; such looks of wonder in their pretty round eyes ! A very sad leave-taking. Then Stephen brought Wilford again into the room. It was a last chance. He could scarcely stand, he was so weak and so painfully moved. Once I thought the old man, as his eyes wandered round the room, recognized his eldest son, but I couldn't be sure. I had my hand on his wrist all the while ; the pulse grew faint, very faint, then ceased altogether. His other hand was round Stephen's neck. So he left us—a smile upon his lips, and a kind look in his eyes. Seventy-two years of age. It was more like going to sleep than dying. He looked so grand and handsome, it was difficult to believe that he died

cruel, and relentless, and unforgiving."

"Poor Mr. Wilford!" Violet repeated, her beautiful eyes dim with tears.

"Poor fellow! It is indeed sad for him; and he's terribly shaken by it. He looks very ill, and he seems utterly careless of himself. I fear he has been living rather wildly and recklessly during his long absence. There is much to be said for him, however; he was very young when he went away. I never can bring myself to the belief that he was other than hardly treated. This has been a terrible trial for him. I hope it may be for his good. I hope that he may be able to bear it —at present, I have my fears. I don't like his looks at all, in fact."

"Do you think he is ill?—dangerously ill?"

"He's in a very bad state of health.

I doubt if he has sufficient strength, either of mind or body, to support the shock this must be to him. He is, as it were, stunned by the blow. He moves about like a man in a dream. It is quite pitiful to see him. The great, strong, strapping fellow he was! Now he trembles as he walks; he is bent like an old man; his limbs yield under him; he stares when you address him as though he could not grasp your words; and the tears come into his eyes when he attempts to speak; he eats nothing—I am afraid he has been in the habit of supporting himself too much by recourse to stimulants; he sits shivering by the fire, so close as almost to burn his clothes. And it seems he fainted last night—once out in the garden, after his interview with his father; Stephen found him on the

ground, half-covered with snow — and again this morning, when he became conscious that the old man was indeed dead. I don't like his looks at all."

"Poor Mr. Wilford!"

A quick footstep outside, and Madge hurries into the room.

"Oh, papa, here's your handkerchief; I quite forgot to give it you. I've been out in the garden; it's such fun. The snow is quite over one's boots, and there's an icicle, Oh, ever so long, hanging from the pump. Oh, and papa, I want you to come with me into the fowl-house; I *do* think that poor old speckled hen whom I always called the Lady Mayoress, because she was such a pompous, strutting old thing, you know, I *do* think she's —why, Vi, why what *is* the mat-

ter? Why, you've been crying—Oh, I'm sure you have. What is the matter? And, papa, why, how solemn *you* look!"

"Hush, my dear," said the doctor; "not so much noise. A very solemn thing has happened. Poor old Mr. Hadfield, of the Grange, is dead. Yes, it's very sad; and I think, Vi, you had better draw down all the blinds. It will only be a proper mark of respect to the bereaved family. I am sure all the shutters in Grilling Abbots will be closed when the sad news becomes known. The poor old man, whatever his faults, has been very kind to all about his estate, and many a poor fellow hereabouts has lost a good friend by his death. Was that some one ringing the

surgery-bell? I'll go and see myself. Don't keep your boots on, Madge, if they're wet; and there'll be hardly any more going out to day."

"Don't cry, Vi, dear," and kind Madge kisses her sister. Not boisterously this time, but with much quiet tenderness. "How dreadful death is, isn't it, Vi?" And then poor Madge cannot help crying too.

The news had soon reached Grilling Abbots. The butcher, calling for orders early in the morning, had learnt of poor Mr. Hadfield's death from the housekeeper. He was the first to bring the mournful intelligence into the town. He beat William Ostler—who heard of it from Groom Frank—out with his horses for a morning exercise—he beat William Ostler by about ten minutes.

Of course the butcher, hurrying back, yet found time to stop every one he met, and jerk out of himself—he was not a conversationalist, and speech was always with him rather a matter of effort—the simple announcement, “Poor old gen’leman’s gone.” But the few words were sufficient for the occasion. So far as Grilling Abbots was concerned there was but one poor old gen’leman who could go. Everybody said that it was only to be expected, and that no one ought to be surprised; and yet somehow all looked as though they had not expected it, and were surprised. The old sexton—what a shrivelled mummy of a man he was, in his wide-rimmed hat and long-skirted rusty great coat! his granddaughters (it was thoughtful of them, for the morning was bitterly cold) had wound a comforter of great

length many times round his neck, so that little of his face was visible—the old sexton was seen wending his way to the church, swinging the keys in his hand. “I didn’t think I should have to toll for him, and he a good six years older nor me; I thought the Colonel would have been the last of the Hadfields I should ever have tolled for. I suppose we’ll have funeral sermon next Sunday; most likely; I warrant Parson won’t leave a dry eye in town afore he’s done with ‘em. Poor old gen’leman; and only seventy-two—quite a young man one may say, little better nor in his prime.”

Within an hour and a half it was known at Mowle. Old Mr. Bartlett—(firm of Parkinson, Bartlett, & Co.; but old Mr. Parkinson has been dead some years, and his son, who nominally represents

the head of the firm, is not thought much of as a lawyer, though highly esteemed by all Mowle as a cricketer; indeed he is one of the Uplandshire eleven gentlemen-players),—Old Mr. Bartlett seemed quite startled by the news; he said “God bless me!” three times over, as his manner was when much disturbed, and fell to pondering which of the two wills he had prepared for the late Mr. Hadfield would be carried into execution. The long will made some years before, twelve foolscap sheets, settled by Mr. Spinbury (Equity Draughtsman and Conveyancer, 34, Old Square, Lincoln’s Inn, called to the bar in ’19); or the short will of a very little while ago, when the testator had asked so many questions as to the effect of cancelling wills, &c. Somehow Mr. Bartlett seemed to desire that the

long will should be the one to be carried out ; it was an admirable will, beautifully drawn, quite a work of art in its way, and on twelve foolscap sides ; what a pity to make waste paper of such a will as that ! Well, yes, perhaps, as a will, it was hard upon the eldest son ; perhaps it was *that* ; and Mr. Bartlett prepared himself for a summons to the Grange. At the undertaker's too, Mr. Tressell's, there was some excitement. Mr. Tressell knew that his services would be required ; he was the only undertaker for miles round, and already he commenced to busy himself amongst his sable properties and paraphernalia. Would it be a grand funeral ? Perhaps very much on the plan of Colonel Hugh's. Simple, but substantial ; merely the family at the Grange as mourners, with the addition, of course,

of the doctor and the lawyer. Perhaps two mourning coaches would be sufficient, with four horses, of course; though he should have preferred three, if not four, coaches. The more the better. What funerals always wanted was length. Give them *length*, and the effect was certain; and so on: and involuntarily, he commenced rubbing up the brass tips of his baton. A highly respectable man, and a good and moral in his way. Yet, somehow, one has a sort of shrinking from a trade that makes all its money out of mortality, that lives by death: I don't think I should ever like a child of mine to be a coffin-maker. What is he to know of the awe of the grave, who cannot but identify it with such details as bronze nails, white satin lining, silver handles and plate, &c.? And the old

rector, too, the Reverend Edward Mainstone, was he to feel nothing at the loss of his old parishioner—had he no duties to perform on the sad occasion? The dead man had been his very good friend for many long years; there had been one or two quarrels between them; both were a little hot, and obstinate, and proud; “high and mighty” was the Grilling Abbots description of the chronic state of mind of the two old gentlemen; but these disagreements had not been very lasting. If the rector could charge some faults to the debit of old Mr. Hadfield, he could bring many good qualities to his credit. How could he regard reproachfully for any long time, one who was so persistently kind to the poor on his estates, who rebuilt cottages, who distributed coals and blankets so liberally in the

winter, who repaired the church, including the chancel, entirely at his own cost? The rector lamented the death of his old friend deeply. Indeed the old feel always the loss of their contemporaries very much. In youth, perhaps, we can afford to waste and lose both our friends and our money; in age we needs must be economical with regard to both. We are past making new friendships or earning more money. The Reverend Edward Mainstone, too, had a duty to perform.

“They will expect me to mention it on Sunday,” he said. “I’d rather not. I feel my heart will hardly let me speak upon the subject. Yet, I suppose I must. One thing,” he added, with a sad smile, “any common-place will do. The poor souls will only be too ready with their tears. They loved, though they feared

him, while he lived. They will only love him now. My dear old friend!"

And the rector's eyes were very dim just then.

"Let me see," he said. "What did I say when the poor Colonel was taken from us? Let me look out that sermon."

There was only one drawback to the general grief of the neighbourhood at the death of Mr. Hadfield of the Grange. It soon began to be bruited about that Mr. Wilford, the eldest son, was disinherited. It would be vain to ask how this fact became known, even before the funeral and the formal reading of the will by the family solicitor. But the world must be, by this time, pretty well aware that the occurrences of the drawing-room and parlour do not take place without the cognizance of the butler's

pantry and the kitchen. When we begin to have servants we leave off possessing secrets. We live in glass houses ; we throw ourselves open to public inspection, like so many picture galleries. You have only to get a ticket from Thomas or James, and you can walk round and examine us as though we belonged to you. It is a servant's privilege to have the most notable circumstances in his employer's biography at his fingers' ends, and to be able to comment upon them boldly and freely. Does the Oriental plan answer ? Do the mute servitors refrain from revealing by gesticulations and the dumb alphabet the secrets of their employers ? I doubt it. Certainly the occidental servants use their tongues enough, and if those organs were removed, I believe they would yet manage —perhaps with their toes—to narrate of

their masters, and to canvass their conduct. Say that the servants of the Grange knew all about their late master's will, and then there will be no wonder that all the good folks of Grilling Abbots were well acquainted with it, too. And, be it told, they disapproved the testator's disposition of his property. Conservatism was very strong in Grilling Abbots. They had entirely orthodox views concerning the rights of primogeniture. They deemed it only right that estates should descend from father to son in one uninterrupted line. They could not understand this cutting off the lawful heir. And they sympathized with Mr. Wilford, and were very sorry for him. He might have been a bit wild, they admitted; but what then? A good many of the Hadfields had been a bit wild in their youth, and what harm

had come of it, after all? Nothing to speak off. And he was much more like the old Hadfields—the living image of the picter in the long room at the Grange, of the Hadfield as went to Indy—they *would* call it Indy,—much more like the old Hadfields than Mr. Stephen, who was a nice civil-spoken gentleman, to be sure, they all admitted; but not so much of a Hadfield as Mr. Wilford—no—and not the eldest son, neither.

Before a roaring fire in the library Mr. Wilford sat scorching his thin white face. Mr. Tressell was up-stairs. He was consulting with, and taking instructions from Stephen as to the funeral. Stephen had endeavoured to interest his elder brother in these proceedings; indeed, had appeared anxious to cede to him the chief place in the household.

But Wilford had declined all intervention.

“Do what you think best, Steenie. I am sure what you do will be right. I cannot counsel you. Indeed I am useless here. But you are the master of the Grange. I cannot think or speak. My head is so heavy, and I cannot get warm. Would I were dead! Let them bring me some more wine.”

He had not spoken so much since the death of the old man. Stephen led Gertrude to him.

“Say something to him, Gertrude,” he whispered to her. Try and rouse him from this torpor he has fallen into. Try and comfort him.”

A calm, handsome, blonde woman, with long flowing skirts, Gertrude Hadfield, approached her brother-in-law.

She was very elegant and refined. Perhaps these qualities necessitate a certain reticence, if not an absence of feeling. Yet in her impassive way she was deeply attached to her husband and her children, and she had been a favourite with the late Mr. Hadfield. She brought her children with her and stooped before Wilford.

“Be comforted, brother,” she said to him in a soft voice. He looked at her with a wan smile.

“Steenie’s wife,” he murmured, “and his children. How old this makes one seem!”

“Go, Saxon,” she said to her baby son, “go and kiss your uncle.”

“I don’t like to,” cried the boy. “I’m afraid.”

“What? Why, I am quite ashamed of

you. What will be thought of you? Not kiss poor Uncle Wilford?"

"Don't," said Wilford, with a dark frown, "don't teach them *that*. Don't teach them what they'll have to unlearn in a week. They mustn't call *me* uncle. Never, never. I am no more a Hadfield!"

The poor lady, rather terrified, shrank back with her children.

"What does he mean?" she asked herself. "Is he mad?"

"Mamma," said one of the children, "why is the room so dark?—why mayn't we open the shutters?—why mayn't we play at horses?"

"Hush, Agnes: don't ask such questions, or I must ring for nurse. Come away."

CHAPTER VI.

CRAPE.

THE passing bell ceased to toll. The family vault of the Hadfields in the old Norman church of Grilling Abbots was opened and closed again. The Rev. Edward Mainstone preached a funeral sermon—only half audible though—for every now and then his words were merged and lost in his genuine sobs and emotion; but still sufficient was heard to move his whole congregation

to tears. Perhaps very little was needed to do that. A neat tablet was erected in the church—white marble bordered with black, like a sheet of deep mourning note-paper, with an inscription, “*Sacred to the memory of George Richard Saxon Carew Hadfield, late of this parish, who departed this life,*” and so on. The old sexton would stand contemplating this tablet for hours. People now began to tap their foreheads, and raise their eyebrows, and nod mysteriously when they spoke of the sexton. Mr. Joyce of the George had even ventured to say that, in his opinion, the sexton “had gone downright cracked!” but this was in a free moment, late in the evening, after the rummers had been filled up rather frequently; and he was reproved, if not punished, by his wife for so strong and unwarrantable an assertion. “*Aged seventy-*

two," the sexton would mumble over and over again. "A mere boy—a mere boy. To think that I should live to see his funeral—to see *that* put up here. I thought the old Colonel had been the last. *Late of this parish*—don't it say? My eyesight ain't what it was. Yes, *of this parish*, and a deal of good he's done for it in his time, as I can bear witness. A good old gentleman. God bless him for it! God bless him!" And he turned away, the keys jingling in his trembling hand. Mr. Tressell had been quite satisfied with the funeral. "Very nice and gentlemanly," he said, as he re-wrapped the baton, with the brass tips, in silver-paper. "Very nice indeed. But you may always trust the county families for that," he went on; "they understand burying. You may always tell a gentleman by his funeral. Well, perhaps it would have been better

if the chief mourner had clean shaved. A beard at a burying *was* out of place, strictly speaking. It gave a furrin air to the thing. Still it was nice and gentlemanly on the whole." Others beside Mr. Tressell had commented upon the appearance of the late Mr. Hadfield's elder son. "That Mr. Wilford?" they said. "How old looking!—only eight-and-twenty? Why, he looks forty, at least! And how white that dreadful crape makes his face look! Poor young man! He must be very ill—very much cut up—very disappointed perhaps—ah! most likely that was it." So Grilling Abbots commented; and old Mr. Bartlett (of the firm of Parkinson, Bartlett, & Co.) was reassured. The short will had been destroyed—the long will was left in force. He was sorry for the elder son, of course. Still

it would have been a thousand pities to have thrown away, to have made waste paper, absolutely waste paper, of a will so perfectly, so beautifully drawn as that had been, and settled by Mr. Spinbury, of Old Square. And Mr. Bartlett rubbed his plump white hands together until his mourning rings glittered like diamonds.

At the Grange the shutters were thrown open again, and the clear winter light once more poured in at the windows. Stephen's children, in deep mourning, were permitted to resume their games at horses; but with a proviso that they did not make too much noise, or in any way annoy their uncle Wilford.

“Mamma, is he really our uncle?” lisped little Agnes.

“Yes, yes, of course he is,” answers

mamma, rather frightened lest the question should have been overheard.

“Then why doesn’t he give us things like our other uncles? Why doesn’t he kiss us more, and play with us, and tell us fairy stories?”

“Hush, Agnes—because Uncle Wilford’s not well, because he’s very sad and sorry. By-and-by he’ll be better, I daresay, and then he’ll play with you as long as you like.”

“Ah!” remarks the young lady with a premature wisdom, “if he’s ill, he oughtn’t to drink so much wine, and nurse thinks so too.”

“Be quiet, Agnes; you must never say such rude things.”

“Oh, mamma, do look at Saxon—what a mess he’s made his new crape in!”

The family had assembled in the

large drawing-room after the funeral, to hear the will read. The children, marvelling what could be the meaning of this unusual conclave, disturbed its peace by intermittent kicking at the door, greatly to Mrs. Stephen's displeasure, who inveighed loudly against the ceaseless negligence of modern nurses.

“Jeffries, *do* keep the children upstairs and quiet for half an hour,” she said, in tones, for her, almost peremptory.

“Saxon, *you* don’t know where grandpapa’s gone to—I do,” Miss Agnes remarks, with an air of wisdom.

“Where then, miss? You don’t know,” answers little Saxon, offended at this assumption of superior information.

“Up there—in the skies, higher than

ever I can throw my ball. See,"—and she suits the action to the word.

"Will *he* come down again?" asks the little boy, as he sees the ball fall.

The subject is too vast for his early intelligence to cover, and Miss Agnes can render him no assistance. She dismisses the topic, or moves, perhaps, the previous question with the words—

"Be my horse, Sax," and soon there is a sound of little feet tramping in the hall.

Mr. Bartlett reads the will, rather pompously, holding up his gold-rimmed double eye-glasses. It is a tiresome business. Mrs. Stephen quite loses her way in it before the first page has been turned. Stephen looks bewildered. Wilford leans his head on his hands, and crouches by the fire: he seems

abstracted, and very cold. He shivers now and then, when his teeth quite chatter. Mrs. Stephen has soon given up the thing as hopeless. She passes the time in listening to the children, and endeavouring to guess at their proceedings. They are very quiet now. How she trusts that they are at no mischief! They are noisy again now—how noisy! She can barely hear Mr. Bartlett's voice. She grows quite hot and uncomfortable. What a noise! How fast they are running! Oh, if Agnes should hurt herself! Oh, if Saxon were to fall down! Is there to be no end to the will—and what does it all mean?

Mr. Bartlett glanced at Wilford when the reading was finished.

“He takes it very quietly,” said the lawyer to himself. “Does he under-

stand it? ‘Cut off with a shilling;’ that I suppose would be the popular description of the eldest son’s position. It seems cruel, but of course a man has a right to do what he likes with his own, or else what would be the use of will-making? Still there’s almost a case for him. He might try to upset the will—its provisions do seem to be a little unnatural. Was the testator sane when he executed it? The date some years back—sane? As sane as any man in the county—no evidence to go to the jury—eccentric perhaps—a little, now and then. But I don’t think it would be possible to colour that into madness. Yet he might try. If I were in his shoes *I* should. The judges don’t like upsetting wills, but we needn’t go so far as that. We might settle the case

out of court. If I were he, I should attempt a compromise, and commence legal proceedings—that of course. They have a wonderful effect sometimes, have legal proceedings, especially in families; all the women get up *en masse*. Oh, don't let it go into the newspapers! Divide the money—anything! Yes, if he were well advised he might get very good terms—very good indeed—an exceedingly nice slice of the Hadfield property. But, of course, it isn't for Parkinson, Bartlett, & Co. to make any stir in the matter. *They* indeed would probably be engaged on the other side—on behalf of the family—in support of the will."

And Mr. Bartlett smilingly contemplated a long and charming vista of legal proceedings, paved with bills of costs, the Lord Chancellor in the ex-

treme distance giving judgment on an appeal to the House of Lords in the suit of Hadfield and Hadfield. What a beautiful tree of litigation and entanglement he pictured to himself growing out of the long will settled by Mr. Spinbury of Old Square! But he had to snap off his day-dream quite short, for it was growing dark—a glass of sherry and a biscuit to refresh himself after his long labours, and then to be driven back to Mowle in his hired fly. Again he glanced at Wilford, but he made no sign.

“He’ll think it over, and I daresay I shall hear something definite in a few days. When he wakes up to-morrow and finds himself a beggar, why, he won’t like it—and—and he’ll act accordingly.”

The remark was cautious, if vague.

Mr. Bartlett muttered on his way homewards. He was meditating an item in his attendance-book.

“ Let me see. 3rd January. To long attendance reading over the will of the late G. R. S. C. Hadfield to the family, and explaining the different points thereof, when we pointed out the immediate effect of the provisions of the will and the various contingencies arising therefrom, and long conference thereupon. Engaged $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours, about: let us say 5; 2 guineas? I think I might say three. There’s plenty of money in the case. Ah! and add—hire of fly to the Grange and back, what will that be? Eight-and-six, perhaps,—well, we’ll say a guinea. No one can complain of that.”

Mr. Bartlett gone, Mrs. Stephen with a thankful heart hurried to her child-

ren. She found Saxon with his face puckered up, from a strong inclination to cry, and his knees very red from a recent fall. But there was no material harm done.

Stephen advanced to his brother.

“You heard the will?” he asked. Wilford nodded.

“I regret the terms of it very much,” said Stephen, “for I feel that an injustice has been done to you. But indeed this need make no difference, really. The Grange is yours, if you will have it. During our lives it shall be the home of both of us, as it was, years ago, in our boyhood. All that the will gives me shall be quite as much yours as mine, brother. There has been no difference between *us*—never. Let there be none now.”

“You are very generous, Stephen, but—”

“Had there been no will, brother, you would have welcomed me, I’m sure. You would have opened your doors to me—you would have bade me make your house my home. There is alteration in words, but there is little change in fact—only it is for me, now, to do what you would have done then. Come, Wilford, look up—be consoled—make the Grange your home—look upon the Hadfield lands as your own—they shall be as much yours as mine, and if there is need for form in the matter, why, we’ll have a lawyer in, and make the matter secure with parchment and sealing-wax.”

“You are very kind, Stephen, but indeed this must not be. The estates are yours—honestly yours——”

“Then may I not do what I will with them,” Stephen interrupted. “May

I not share them with you, Wil?"

"No, Stephen. There's a duty to be considered in the matter. Are we not bound to obey our father's will? If he pleased to leave his property with the express view of my receiving no benefit from it, are we justified in seeking to evade his determination? No. I was disobedient enough while he lived, let me at least obey him now that he is dead."

"But it was a mere freak, Wilford —an impulse of passion against you which, had he lived, he would have sorely repented of, and made you amends for."

"I cannot think so, Steenie," the elder brother said sorrowfully. "The will was made deliberately enough, years ago. Had he no opportunity of altering its provisions, do you think, in

all that time? Well, he had, and he did alter them. He made a new will, restoring me to my position as his eldest son. He saw me—heaven knows what new wrong there was to him in my presence, or what he wished me to say or do more than I said and did. But he cast me off anew—he destroyed the new will before my face; he told me that not one halfpenny of his money should I ever touch; he forbade me to look upon myself as his son. Let it be so. Let me never receive a fraction of benefit from his property—let me no more be accounted his son or your brother."

Wilford spoke almost fiercely at last, and his manner rather alarmed Stephen.

"What will you do, Wilford?"

"Leave here at once—to-day—to-morrow—as soon as I feel a little

better and stronger. I don't know how it is, but I am strangely shattered and broken of late. I am so weak that I can barely stand, and I tremble all over. My throat is so parched and burning, and such strange things dance before my eyes, that I feel at times quite giddy, as though my brain were going. But this will wear off. Then I quit this place for ever."

"Where will you go?"

"God knows. It will matter little. I will turn my back upon Grilling Abbots for ever. They shall never write up my name in the church—never hear more of me. Far away, where I drop down, there let them bury me—a stranger! Don't fear that I will bring further shame upon the name; for, indeed, I will cease to bear it any longer. Let it go with the estates.

Why should I rob you and your children? What right have I to plunder them of their portions?—honestly and lawfully theirs. It must not be. I will go from here very shortly, a stranger, never to return. Your children need never know that such a person has ever lived. They will soon forget me, and more need never be told them. Indeed, there will be nothing more to tell. I shall have gone away like that old ancestor of ours—never to come back—never to be heard of more."

"But how will you live?"

"For that matter there will be money enough yet remaining to me under our mother's will, Steenie, to keep body and soul together, and perhaps the sooner they part company the better. I shall not starve. How cold I am! Put another log on, Steenie. This dreadful thirst! Let them bring

me something to drink—water—anything."

"What has he been saying?" asked Gertrude, anxiously, as she encountered her husband on his quitting Wilford.

"He talks in a strange way; insists upon leaving the Grange at once—for ever, he says."

Gertrude could hardly suppress an exclamation of the relief she felt. Indeed, she was fairly frightened at Wilford's gloomy manner and wild looks, both on the children's account and her own.

"Is he sane, Ste, do you think?" she inquired.

Stephen mused over this question.

"I have sometimes thought," he said, after a pause, "that his mind was rather affected with all that has passed. Certainly he has a strange look now and then. Yet there was nothing like insanity

in what he said. It must be owned though," in a lower tone, "that he drinks much more than he should. He will kill himself if he goes on in this way, and I'm afraid the servants will get talking about him down in the village. Give orders for my horse to be brought round.

"Where are you going, Ste?"

"I'll have a talk with old Fuller about him."

"Take care how you go. The road is very slippery."

"I'll ride the bay; he's very sure-footed. Never fear, Gertrude."

And Stephen set off. His wife determining that, during his absence, she would be careful to prevent the children going too near their uncle Wilford. For she had made up her mind that he was clearly out of his mind, and

perhaps dangerous—people out of their minds often were.

Vi and Madge, at work in the snug front parlour of Mr. Fuller's pretty white cottage, perceived a horseman advancing along the road which led from the Grange. Of course they began to speculate, after the manner of dwellers in the country, as to who this could be coming along, and what he could possibly want.

“A man all in black on a bay horse; why, it must be one of the Hadfield people,” said Madge. “How slowly he comes along! The road is like glass just there. Do you see the poor horse can hardly keep his feet.”

“It’s Stephen Hadfield. Why, he’s coming here.”

“Don’t you think he’s very handsome, Vi?”

“Pretty well. They’re a handsome family, the Hadfields, and Stephen is good and gentlemanly-looking; but yet, somehow, a little *tame*, I think. He has not the marked features of the others. I don’t think he’s so handsome as his father was; or, indeed, as his brother is.”

“His brother? What, Vi, do you admire that strange, wild creature, with the long, straggling beard? What taste! What taste! Why, he quite frightens me. He looks like a Vampire, or something odd out of the Arabian Nights.”

“Ah, Madge, you like smug people, don’t you? with smoothly brushed hair, and ribston pippin cheeks; let us say, like Tommy Eastwood.”

“Be quiet, Vi. You know I don’t care a bit about Tommy Eastwood, but

I *do* prefer apple cheeks to lantern jaws and hollow eyes. There now. You may make the most of that, and tease me about it, as papa does. I see what it is though. You're one of those sly, quiet girls who love a bit of romance all the same. I do believe you'd like that awful creature, Wilford Hadfield, to come down to the cottage in chain mail, armed to the teeth, brandishing a battle-axe, and carry you off on a coal-black steed. Wouldn't you like it, Vi? I'm sure you would; nothing would please you better, for all you're sitting there so demure and mum, mending your stockings, than to be Mrs. Brian de Bois Gilbert, or some awful person of that sort. I know you, Miss Vi, better than you think."

"Be quiet, Madge," Vi interposes, laughing."

“Yes, you’re romantic. I’m practical. You like novels with lots of sentiment in them, and that sort of stuff. I like funny stories that make one die of laughing. Hallo! Vi. Stephen Hadfield’s coming here. Will he come into this room, do you think? Isn’t my dress awfully untidy—and isn’t this collar crumpled; and my hair feels as though it had all tumbled down at the back. Has it, Vi? I wish I could look so neat and trim as you always do; but I never shall, I know. Oh, it’s all right. He’s gone into the surgery.”

“I hope there’s no one ill at the Grange.”

Stephen Hadfield consulted for some time with Mr. Fuller in his surgery. The doctor was informed of Wilford’s plans for the future, so far as they had been unfolded. Something also was

said of the symptoms of ill health that Wilford had manifested.

"I didn't at all like his looks at the funeral," said Mr. Fuller, reflectively.

"Come up to the Grange, and see him and talk to him. He is very fond of you. I know no one who has more influence over him. Try and persuade him to abandon this project of quitting us. Doubtless he is much hurt and grieved at my father's will, which is unquestionably very cruel to him in its provisions; but it shall be my care to soften these so far as he is concerned. He shall never feel that any real difference has been made between us. He shall be master of the Grange if he will."

"That's right, Stephen," said the doctor, heartily, "I'm glad to hear you speak like that. The poor lad has been

hardly dealt with. He'll be better by-and-by, mind and body. We'll take care of both. We'll bring him to think differently of all these matters. I'll come up to the Grange to-night and have a talk with him."

True to his word, the Doctor visited the Grange in the evening, and had a long discussion with Wilford. He was always more open in his conversation with the Doctor than with any one else.

"This place sickens me—I cannot bear to look around me.—On every side I see something that reminds me of the day I went away—of the night I came back. I hear *his* voice in every room. The story of the Prodigal is always ringing in my ears. I perpetually see him tearing up the new will, or pointing to the blotted lines in the

Bible. Let me only get away from here."

"Where will you go?"

"To London, I will lose myself there," he said, grimly, "the place is big enough. I will change my name—my nature too, if I can. Let me live and die uncared for—unknown. I ask no more."

The Doctor contemplated him for some moments as though weighing his words and identifying him with them.

"How like his father," muttered Mr. Fuller; "and obstinate, like all the Hadfields;" and the Doctor took Wilford's hand abruptly, almost mechanically it seemed, gazing into his face the while. He let go his wrist with a start.

"What a pulse! do you know that you are very feverish—very ill?"

"I fear so. No matter. I must go. I'll get help in London."

"You'll drop down and die on the road before you've gone half a mile from the place."

His words seemed to carry conviction to the mind of Wilford.

"What shall I do?" he asked sadly, his eyes wandering and his limbs falling listlessly.

"I'll tell you," Mr. Fuller answered. "You shall leave here." Wilford brightened. "You shall come to my cottage. I'll watch you till you're quite yourself again. Then you shall leave us, not before. You shall live as quietly and retired as you please; shall see no one. No one shall know of your presence there. You shall be called by what name you choose. You shall have your own way in everything. Will you come?"

He reflected for a few minutes.

“I may leave when I please?”

“If you are well, mind; not unless.”

“You will not seek to change my plans?”

“I will never again allude to them, if you prefer that I should not do so.”

“I’ll come,” said Wilford.

“To-morrow, mind; early. Let them drive you over in the covered carriage.”

And the Doctor sought out Stephen, and informed him of what had passed.

“We must humour him,” said the Doctor. “Be satisfied he shall come back here, safe and well, in a few weeks; only, if we oppose him now, we drive these strange notions of his about the Grange into confirmed mania: already they grow upon him fearfully; they prey upon him in all sorts of ways. With returning health will come

a happier frame of mind. He shall be a new creature soon."

"Let it be as you wish, Doctor," said Stephen, and Mr. Fuller returned to his cottage.

He was muttering to himself all the way home.

"Chilliness and shivering," he said; it was almost as though he were quoting from medical notes, "succeeded by heat, restlessness, thirst, and fever. Very bad; very bad. That boy—I can't help calling him so—one thing—he'll always be a boy to me—that boy, mark my words' (he was forgetful apparently of the fact that there was no one present who could do anything of the kind), "that boy will be prostrate in a few days, and I shall have my work cut out for me to set him up again. It will be as much as they'll do to get him round to the

cottage to-morrow—acute pains in the knees, wrists, shoulders; shifting pains, which you never know where to expect next, then absolute helplessness. A nice programme for a patient. Very bad, very bad! And then pleurisy, perhaps, or endocarditis, or pericarditis. Yes, and then another job for Mr. Tressell, of Mowle, and another tablet in Grilling Abbots Church. And all that comes of improper diet, and disordered blood, and undue exposure to cold! Why won't people be more careful? But they won't, and so it's no use talking. Perhaps it would be worse for doctors if they were to be more careful. Blood-letting? No. I don't think that we can afford blood-letting in this case. We'll try iodide of potassium, or perhaps the alkalies and alkaline carbonates with calomel and opium. I have great faith in the alkalies myself.

I remember in that important case at Mowle——”

And the Doctor wandered into medical reminiscences.

“Have the spare bedroom ready for to-morrow, Vi,” he said, entering his cottage, “and everything well-aired. We’re going to have a visitor.”

“Who, papa dear?” asks Miss Madge; “do tell me!”

“I heard you this morning, Madge. You talk loud enough. Who? why, *The Vampire!*”

CHAPTER VII.

AN INVALID.

THE Doctor's predictions were verified.

It was with difficulty that Wilford Hadfield was moved from the Grange to the cottage. Symptoms of illness increased to an alarming extent; the acute painfulness of his disorder was intensified. He was soon in a state of entire helplessness, prostrate on the bed in Mr. Fuller's spare room. A violent attack of rheumatic fever had deprived

him of the use of his limbs. He was destined to be for many weeks a prisoner in the Doctor's cottage—a prey to a very painful malady.

The attentions of the Doctor and his family were unremitting. The poor sufferer could hardly have been better, more tenderly cared for. Daily Stephen Hadfield rode over from the Grange to inquire after the welfare of his brother. At the worst stage of his illness Dr. Barker had been brought from the Mowle Infirmary to see the patient, while there had been some thought at one time of summoning Dr. Chillingworth again from London. But Dr. Barker had assured the family that the invalid was in no danger; certainly, unless he was very much mistaken, in no immediate danger, while it was not possible for him to be in better hands

than in those of Dr. Barker's very good friend, Mr. Fuller. All concerned were then convinced that everything was being ordered for the best; the more so that it shortly became evident that the patient's state of health was improving. Even Mrs. Stephen was at length brought round to this view of the case. It had been her first impulse to send for medical aid from London. In fact she was a London lady, and prone to the opinion that skill and science could hardly be looked for out of her favourite metropolis. But she could not fail to appreciate the care and cleverness of Mr. Fuller. To do her justice, she had now conquered the fears she had certainly at one time entertained in regard to her brother-in-law. Once aware that he was really ill, having perhaps taken the precaution

of ascertaining that his disorder was of no infectious character, and in no way threatened the safety of her children, she entered the sick-room confidently, with the full intention of aiding the invalid and sharing in his nursing to the utmost of her ability. With much natural and constitutional timidity, and an absence of all force of character, Mrs. Stephen was, nevertheless, not so entirely the water-colour sort of woman she might at first glance have been accounted. A little wanting in certainty of expression, with an air of refinement and culture that seemed to negative the possession of feelings, although the effect was in reality only to restrict their demonstration, and a particularity in dress, especially in regard to the minutiae of the toilet, Mrs. Stephen Hadfield,

notwithstanding these fashion-book characteristics, was genuinely kind and tender-hearted, with all feminine sympathy for suffering, and with abundance of the emotions that prompt self-sacrifice, had occasion ever demanded of her conduct of so high an order. Wilford well, there was a strangeness about him which startled her whose respect for "convention" was inclined to be exaggerated; but her husband's brother, ill, helpless, in an agony of pain—dying, perhaps—all the noblest feelings of her heart had been excited on his behalf, and she would have toiled herself to death to benefit him in any, the slightest way. On the whole, Stephen Hadfield had reason to be proud of his wife. The woman had not been sacrificed to

the lady—perhaps at one time there had been a danger of this—but Gertrude Hadfield had passed scathless through the trial. Unlike some of her neighbours, she had cleverness enough to perceive that although society requires from its members placidity and repose, by these are not necessarily implied either petrifaction of feeling or ossification of heart.

Have not sickness and suffering some kind of fascination for women? Is there not in these truly an “open sesame” to their hearts? But I fancy—may I so state without being deemed rude?—that women are always partial to anomalies, and that the combination of sovereignty and servitude involved in the act of nursing somehow particularly recommends it to their not too logical minds. Is a male

writer to discuss such a question ? But to rule in the sick-room the slave of the sick man—is, it seems to me, a favourite position with women. There is recognition of their power in it—while there is room for their tenderness—which, from its nature, must obey and serve rather than command and sway. Be well, healthy, vigorous in body and in mind, and a woman finds something defiant in such a state—something antagonistic to herself, especially if she admit with M. Michelet that she herself is “always an invalid,”—and her heart does not turn to you ; your love will be too hard for her ; you will rule and possess her too absolutely ; she will be without a chance of governing ever so little in her turn, in her own peculiar way. Sink at her feet, pale, suffering, imploring her aid,

and she will bend down with tears in her eyes, lavishing upon you the utmost treasure of her love, slaving for you as only women can slave, and she will be yours for ever, for will it not be your own fault if you permit her heart, once yours, to quit you when your health returns ?

Gertrude, Vi, and Madge were indefatigable in their attendance upon Wilford Hadfield. If Mrs. Stephen was inclined to relieve the Miss Fullers of their share of nursing, the good Doctor interfered on their behalf. As doctor's daughters, he said, if they did not understand nursing, who did ? And had not Vi nursed so and so, and so and so, on such and such an occasion, and wasn't her name as a nurse famous all through Grilling Abbots ? So Mrs. Stephen was compelled to withdraw her opposition

to the labours of the Doctor's daughters, and especially her proposition that the housekeeper from the Grange should be sent to render assistance. The whole household of the Doctor's cottage, including Hester the cook and Hannah the housemaid, were at the disposal of the invalid, and what more could he or any one possibly require?

Wilford bore his sufferings very patiently. With deep gratitude he watched the kind labours of his nurses on his account. He was terribly weak and thin, and there were now perceptible threads of grey in his long tangled hair. He spoke very little, but he was evidently emerging from that state of lethargy and listlessness into which he had fallen prior to his illness, possibly as a symptom of its approach. There was an animation in his large

black eyes they had not known for some time.

“He will be all the better for this illness,” said Mr. Fuller to Stephen, “when we once get him fairly through it. He will start afresh, as it were, on a new road; he will leave old habits of life, old thoughts and plans, a long way behind him.”

“Has he spoke of his future proceedings? Do you think he has changed his views at all?” Stephen asked.

“He never mentions the subject, and I am careful not to do so. But I take it for granted he thinks very differently *now*. I shall conclude that he does so until I learn from his own lips the contrary. His getting well, now, is simply a matter of time. Pain has left him, or nearly so; he has now to regain his strength, and we

mustn't hurry him. A man doesn't recover in a day from an illness like that."

For the patient, the tedium of convalescence seems to be only a few degrees less insufferable than the tedium of illness. How the eyes of the sick man fasten upon all the details of the room, and thoroughly exhaust them ! That is a dreadful moment when you feel that you have quite done with the paper on the wall, and that by no possibility can further interest even unconsciously be drawn from it. Wilford knew all the rose-buds by heart—he knew exactly where they would spring out of the scroll-work, and where they would disappear behind it; he knew the place in the pattern where, by some accident in the printing, the colour of one particular rose was some half inch from

its outline. He knew each join in the paper. He had studied every pleat in the dainty white bed-hangings; he had traced human faces in the lines of the curtains till further variety seemed impossible; he knew every stroke in the chalk-drawing (from Carlo Dolce—by Violet Fuller) hanging over the mantelpiece, until the expression of the face, reverential but inane, quite wearied and oppressed him. He knew all the panes in the lattice by heart, especially those diamonds of glass of different hue to their fellows, with a suspicion of green in them or a tendency to blue. What a relief — Heaven, what a relief! — when Madge, kind Madge, brought in her canary-bird for the amusement of the patient, who was to be sure and ring the bell—the rope rested on his pillow—if Dicky became too noisy or trouble-

some. What a temptation for a sick man: ringing would certainly bring Madge back; not ringing—he had her pet-bird to contemplate, with yet the sure prospect of its mistress coming to fetch it in the course of a short time. He determined to wait and make what he could of the bird, still looking forward to another glimpse of kind Madge very soon.

The bird was inclined to be shrill sometimes, undoubtedly. There was a very ear-piercing quality about his note. Yet what a change and a relief to hear his glad, careless, triumphant *fiorituri*—to see him spring from perch to perch—sometimes a soft warm yellow ball, anon his plumage bristling out spread fan-wise in the air,—now sparpening his beak upon his sugar like a knife upon steel; now tossing

his rape-seed over his head like a conjuror playing with his cups and balls! It was a great comfort to the invalid to watch the bird; and the bird exhausted, was there not the cage to turn to?—its reticulations to count and examine, with the view of detecting crooked wires or uneven spaces?

It was known at Grilling Abbots that Mr. Wilford Hadfield was a visitor at Dr. Fuller's cottage. But the circumstances of the case carried explanation with them, and the fact was little commented on. Disinherited and dangerously ill, it was not unnatural that Mr. Wilford should seek aid at the hands of his old friend the Doctor, and Grilling Abbots had no objection to such a proceeding.

For many weeks was the sick man a prisoner in the spare room. When

first he entered it the snow of winter mantled the ground: when he was first able to quit it there was the glory of the early spring abroad. The month that comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb was on the wane. The March winds had dried up the country soaked by the February rains. At sunrise swarms of rooks swept across the skies, seeking their morning meal, battling with the breeze, and circling and tacking to avoid it, till they looked like leaves eddying at the fall. There was some warmth in the sun-rays now, and the languor of coming summer in the air. The woods and lanes were scented with the buds. The hedges were losing their black, skeleton look; they were now purple and gold with renovated blossoms. The honeysuckle on the porch was

already in leaf; the firs and alders were in flower, and green tufts, crimson-pointed, decked the larch. Time, which thus brought beauty to the year, carried convalescence to the sick chamber in Mr. Fuller's cottage. Be sure the early offerings of spring-time adorned the room, and solaced the wearied eyes of the sufferer. Be sure Madge hurried to place in his wasted hands the first violets she could gather; how she had hunted under the fallen tree-trunks in the park—under the moss-coated palings, how she had wet her feet and soiled her dress in her search! — Yet she returned triumphant, with quite a bouquet—with snow-drops too, and a first primrose—while placid Vi had joined in the quest, adding a pansy-bud gathered with some effort from the sunny

top of the garden-wall. The Doctor's daughters had toiled heart and soul for their father's patient. Much of his history they did not know, but it was enough for them that Wilford Hadfield was now poor and suffering—all the care and tenderness of their pure, kind hearts was his again and again.

“Do you know, Vi,” confessed Madge, “I was quite frightened at him when he first came. I thought him so grim and fierce-looking. I did not dare to say a word to him. But I've quite got over that now.”

“There wasn't much to be frightened at, Madge.”

“No, indeed not, and he so sick and weak. Poor creature! I never saw any one look so bad as he did. I've become now quite accustomed to him. I begin to think he's quite handsome.”

“Better-looking than Stephen, even?”

Madge mused, while Violet contemplated her rather closely it would seem.

“Yes, I think even handsomer than Stephen.”

“Yet he’s very worn and wasted, Madge; he looks much older than he really is, and how hollow his eyes are!”

“But they’re no longer wild and savage now. When I took him those flowers he hardly said anything, but do you know, Vi, I think there were almost tears in his eyes. I think, Vi, *you* gave me the idea of gathering those flowers for him.”

“No, Madge, indeed I did not.”

And Miss Violet turned away, perhaps to conceal a blush,  was rising in her cheek. Heaven knows why.

He was very weak still, but on fine

days he was able to leave his bed, and sit at the window of the spare room looking into the garden.

“My nurses,” he said, smiling faintly as he observed Vi and Madge below.

“Yes,” said Mr. Fuller, “your old playfellows, years ago, Wilford. It seems a long while, now, since you were romping on the grass-plot with little Violet and Baby Madge with the red locks. There have been changes since then.”

“There have indeed.”

And the convalescent covered his eyes with his thin hands.

“Shall I read to you?” said the Doctor, “or shall I send up Vi to read to you?” I think she’s a better hand at it than I am.”

“No,” answered Wilford, after a pause, “I’m busy—thinking,” he added, with a smile.

“Yes,” and the Doctor patted him

gently on the shoulder, “and that’s the very thing I don’t want you to do. Your body is not strong enough for you to be using your mind yet. You mustn’t think, unless it be of the future —of getting well. Not of the past.”

And the Doctor quitted him.

“No, not of the past—not of that,” said Wilford, with a shudder.

He took listlessly a book, one of a pile on the table. He opened it mechanically at the title-page. His eye fell upon the name written on the fly-leaf—“Violet Fuller.” He stopped at this with his eyes fixed upon the writing, and twice he read the name aloud—deeply he seemed to ponder over it. Perhaps in that process of vacant meditation of Elaine’s father—

“As when we dwell upon a word we know,
Repeating till the word we know so well
Becomes a wonder, and we know not why.”

Perhaps in more pregnant reflection. At last he shut the book with a start, to snatch himself from a reverie which was only partly pleasurable.

The cottage drawing-room, closely curtained for the night, was lighted only by the red fire glowing in the grate. Violet Fuller was at her piano, now singing snatches of songs—now playing from memory fragments of tunes. Madge was in the surgery, helping—or making believe to help—her father in the business of compounding his medicines. There were the sounds of much laughter proceeding from that quarter of the house, and of much talking and merriment generally. Indeed, noise and merriment seemed to go hand-in-hand with Madge.

Violet Fuller had an exquisite voice. It was low-pitched and of silvery quality when she spoke—raising it in singing, it

was full-toned and glowing with the most noble music. Although she had received little instruction, her tones were admirably under command, for her ear was perfect, and her power of execution, though acquired with little effort, was considerable. Music was with her a natural gift. She seemed to sing and play quite as matters of course. A contrast in this respect to her sister Madge, who studied music (in obedience to the prevalent opinion that it is the bounden duty of every Englishwoman to learn to play on the piano and sing "a little"), but whose natural aptitude for the study was limited—whose voice, though pleasant in quality, was often out of tune, and in whose playing wrong notes were frequently to be detected by a musical bystander, although they were never remarked by the performer, who

was only inharmonious unconsciously.

New and fashionable songs, in which weak words are wedded to weak music, and sentimentality is bought at the price of sickliness, did not often reach Grilling Abbots. The sort of music politeness compels us often to hear in our friends drawing-rooms, when a sylphide with a compressed waist rising from profuse tarlatan gasps out with husky timidity a feeble ballad of most conventional pattern, with a florid lithograph on its cover—music of this sort would have found no favour with Vi Fuller, even if she had been able to obtain it. In this, as in some other matters, Grilling Abbots was a little behind the rest of the world. But an old, well-worn book—it had belonged formerly to the late Mrs. Fuller—containing a *sélection* of songs by Mozart, furnished her favourite music. She

would sit for hours at the piano singing through this book, and her love for the art—or should I say science?—was very great. She would sing all the same whether she had an audience or not; perhaps—but the sylphide with the wasp waist, who regards song as a means to an end, as an accomplishment enhancing her prospects in the marriage market, will hardly credit it—she even preferred to be without an audience, when she could surrender herself wholly to the entrancement of her melody. She loved music for its own sake, and she sung Mozart's songs with all her love, and heart, and soul in her voice.

Most charming of composers! Let us listen for pomp, and passion, and solid grandeur to Beethoven; for religion to Handel; for weirdness and my-

stery to Weber and Meyerbeer; for orchestral epilepsies, or tortured tunes, let us search in the spasmodic scores of modern Italy; but for the poetry of tenderness, for the heart's own sentiment, shall we ever find these in greater perfectness than in the music of Mozart?

It was genuine unaffected singing, very delightful to hear. Her soft white hands floated over the keyboard, the taper fingers finding as it were their own way to the notes, for there was not much light in the room near the piano; her silver voice throbbing through the great master's melodies. And very charming to behold, too, was Vi Fuller seated before her instrument, her liquid grey eyes full of expression and feeling, and the red lips parted to let the heart-laden song stream forth; she was too

admirable a vocalist to distort her face as she sung, though some admirable vocalists are distressingly prone to this defect; and she would sing till sometimes tears stood in her eyes, or her voice threatened to break into sobs; till the song awoke some potent echo in her heart, or music yielded to contemplation, and she wandered unconsciously and silently into strange labyrinths of thought. What was she singing now? *Voi che sapete*, say, or, perhaps, Zerlina's charming *Vedrai carino*.

She stopped at last, quite suddenly—she became conscious of the presence of some one else in the room—she could hear some one breathing behind her, could feel her hair swaying gently under the influence of the breath. She turned quickly, rather frightened.

Pale and gaunt, trembling, supporting himself by a chair, up and dressed, stood Wilford Hadfield, a strangely moved expression in his face. Vi exclaimed in her surprise.

“Forgive me,” he said, in a low voice, “I fear I have startled you.”

“Are you not imprudent? How did you manage to come down?” Vi asked, hurriedly.

“Your singing,” he said, “it seems to me, would bring back the dead; do not wonder that it charmed me down from my sick-room, weak as I am—weaker even than I thought—I had to cling by the banisters a good deal, yet I managed to enter here quietly. Pray forgive me, and continue to sing.”

“But this is very imprudent; the

Doctor will scold you when he knows of it. You may catch cold again. You may retard your recovery terribly by this over-exertion!"

"No matter; I have heard you sing. It has been a balm to my pains and troubles. Pray sing again."

This appeal was so urgent, so weighted by tone and glance, that Violet could not but comply. She sang a few bars, but somehow a curious feeling possessed and awed her; her voice shook.

"No," she said, with a slight agitation; "I can sing no more to-night," and she closed the piano.

"Thank you! you have an angel's voice, Violet. God bless you!"

He took one of her delicate hands into his, pressed it tenderly, raised it to his lips. Then, with a start, he let it

fall, trembled violently, and but for Violet's aid would have fallen. The tears stood in Violet's eyes, and her heart beat with painful quickness. A new emotion—marvellous, half painful,—seemed to be restless in her heart. What could it mean?

With some difficulty the invalid regained his room.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADGE.

THE sisters occupied one bedroom.

Long after Madge had drifted into a deep sleep—she had kept awake to the last moment, talking upon all sorts of subjects with customary volubility: one or two of her more recent observations had indeed been in regard to topics well understood probably in dreamland, but slightly vague and meaningless in more material regions—long after this

Violet Fuller's deep grey eyes were full open, painfully open, with a feeling that rest would not come to them; that a whirl of thoughts oppressed her brain, dazing and fevering; that there was a trouble within her that warred against and hindered repose. How she envied the perfect slumber of her sister!—Madge of the large heart, with room in it for a universal affection, with her love not yet individualized and concentrated and brought to a focus; not yet in its immaturity, appreciating the whole felicity of which it was capable, but still free from one single throb of pain, one suspicion of uneasiness! Madge, deep asleep, unconscious, beautiful, happy; and Violet, the calm, the placid, the apparently impassive! Whither had gone that charm of perfect repose, soothing as soft music, which had been formerly

one of her especial characteristics? Why that hectic colour in her cheeks? Why that new brilliance in her eyes? She raised her hands to smooth her hair from her forehead, and was startled to find how fiercely it burned, how violently beat the pulsings of her temple. She could no longer evade the question that seemed to present itself to her on every side with the persistence of persecution.

Did she love?

Yesterday there had been no thought of such a matter. She was content with her life, had no wish unfulfilled, no ambition to satisfy; the rich stores of her heart were hidden from all. Through what agency was it that light from without had now stolen to those latent treasures; and betrayed their value and beauty to herself, to the world? for so it seemed now, what was so clear

to herself must be as apparent to others. She loved furtively, screened as she thought by her serenity, yet it needed but a glance from *his* eyes, a pressure from *his* hand, to reveal the whole secret, to tear away her mask. A sense of shame came over her at being discovered, a sense of unworthiness; with her reputation for good sense and propriety of demeanour (some of the Grilling Abbots ladies had even accused her of prudery!), the head of her father's household, filling a mother's part to her younger sister, ought she to have gone down in this effortless way, at the first hint? The tears rushed into her eyes, and she sobbed audibly. It was quite as well that Madge was a sound sleeper.

Her compassion had betrayed her into love; her pity for the sufferer—her

sympathy—had brought about this cruel result, for it *was* cruel; she had never before in her whole life felt so truly miserable; and but for that overt act of homage that night, during her singing, her secret had been kept, she should never have known the state of her heart, all would have been well. She wished that she had never learned how to sing, that her voice had gone—at least for that night—that she had never thought of opening the piano. What mad freak prompted her to do so? She had not for a very long while done such a thing. But *for that* she had been safe and happy, and Wilford would have got well and left them, and she had never dreamed of loving him. *Left them?* She had never contemplated *that* before. Would he leave them? Leave *her*? Now

that—yes!—now that she loved him? For she could not help it, and she owned she loved him. Would he go away from the cottage for ever? Oh, heavens! she would sooner die than such a thing should happen. Never to see him more! It would be death!

And then, of course, more tears.

This was in the first turbulence of her new discovery. By-and-by came calmer thoughts. Did *he* love *her*? And her cheeks crimsoned. What happiness if he did! What to her were all the stories about his past life? Did she not know him in the present? Had he not borne the pains of his malady with the patience of a saint? Yes; he loved her! She had read it in his eyes—eyes glowing with truth—eyes that could not lie. He loved her—perhaps—very likely—certainly—Oh,

he must!—there could be no doubt about it! and with that solacing thought hugged tight to her heart, Violet Fuller at last fell happily asleep.

How habit masters emotion! It would have needed a very close observer indeed to have remarked any change in Violet Fuller's manner as on the morrow she pursued her wonted domestic duties. To all appearance her demeanour was the same as usual—simple and calm as ever. Perhaps, on closer study, a certain undercurrent of restlessness might have been detected; but its manifestations were but slight, the surface was singularly unruffled. Doctor Fuller perceived no change, nor did sister Madge—if Wilford Hadfield noticed it, he held his peace upon the matter.

Words are hardly necessary to lovers; certainly they are not needed at the commencement of love; it is at later stages that oral evidence is wanted by way of confirmation, to remove all doubts and satisfy bystanders. But at first, eyes are sufficiently eloquent, and manner tells the story pretty plainly. Perhaps it is better that happiness should come to us at first in not too unqualified a way; it is better to begin not so much "with a little aversion" as with a little uncertainty as to the issue. Violet looked into Wilford's eyes and doubted; Wilford read Violet's glances and trembled—yet each saw enough to make them both very happy. For there is not so much unhappiness in uncertainty as some people would have us believe.

As time went on, Wilford regained health and strength. He was still very pale and gaunt, but it was evident that his illness had wrought a great change in him. He looked much older, and he had acquired a certain air of sedateness—an attribute of middle life—which was new to him. Before, he had been reckless, listless; as a young man he had been rash, hot-headed, impulsive, with yet occasional fits of vacillation. His resoluteness had not been lasting; the opinions he took up strenuously one day he relinquished carelessly the next, unless some unexpected opposition brought into prominent action the obstinacy which was said to be a family characteristic of the Hadrifields—an hereditary possession. Perhaps it is the nature of such a trait as this to strengthen with age. Certainly the

lines about his mouth had deepened of late, evidencing an increased determination, a growth of power of will, while yet his large dark eyes were comparatively quenched; they no longer sparkled with that fierceness which had first alarmed Madge, and excited the attention of the company at the George Inn. Were they softened and liquefied by love?

It was some weeks after Violet had made the discovery—which other ladies, be it said, have often enough made before her—that her heart was of combustible material, and that fire had been brought dangerously near it, or that it was itself capable of generating flame on the least admission to it of influence from without. No further words bringing revelation with them had escaped from Wilford; yet much

was signified, so it seemed to Violet, by that mute homage, that air of deference, that delicacy of conduct a man cannot resist exhibiting towards the woman he loves, and in which Wilford did not fail. Perhaps she was tempted to lay exaggerated stress upon all the trivialities of daily life which were ceaselessly bringing Wilford near to her. Did it not seem, indeed, that he had made it a study to anticipate her slightest wish? For it was his turn now to wait upon her. It was for him, now, to gather at all risks the flowers she loved, to take interest in all the pursuits of her life, to assist her in her drawing and painting, to turn the leaves of her music, and laud in a low voice the beauty of her singing. How small such things seem to all but those immediately concerned

in them, but how great, enhanced, and gilded, and glorified by love, to the actors in the scene! The chronicles of the small beer of love are matters of extreme moment to lovers, and justice has hardly been done to them by the rest of the world, nor patience nor forbearance sufficiently shown. What very simple words and phrases seem to be italicised and large-typed by love; what poor matters are enriched by it; what slight actions magnified; until a world of affection is conveyed in a glance, the devotion of a life in the handing of a chair, or an eternal tenderness in the lifting of a teacup! How large an affection seems to live in that “little language,” Jonathan Swift prattled in his journal to poor Stella! And it is the same in all love’s doings to the end of the chapter. There is great

passion in small, very small proceedings. Love is the apotheosis of petty things; and Cupid turns the world upside down, and makes the rich poor, and the poor rich. Soft accents become of more value than bank-notes—sighs than sovereigns; words are more precious than gold, and moonshine is a legal tender. A very insane state of things indeed!

“I must leave you very soon, now, Doctor.”

“Leave us? *Must?* Why?”

“I have been here too long already,” answered Wilford, looking down.

“Don’t talk nonsense,” quoth the Doctor, bluntly.

“But I am well now. I trespass upon your hospitality. I overtask your kindness. I have no right——”

“My dear boy, I’ll tell you when

we've had enough of you; and be sure it won't be for some time yet. Or is it that you tire of the cottage? that our simple mode of life here wearies you?"

"No, indeed, Doctor, it is not so," Wilford said, with almost superfluous fervour. "I have been—am—very happy here."

"Then why go?"

"Some time or other I must quit you," and he took the Doctor's hand, pressing it, "but never without a deep sense of the gratitude I owe you. You have been indeed a friend to me."

"Pooh!—stuff! And that's the reason you wish to run away from me as quickly as possible? That's why you contradict me, and upset all my plans?"

"No, Doctor, indeed not; but I, too,

have plans to carry out, and now that I am well again——”

“Not too much of that, Master Wilford. I hope you have not left off your quinine mixture in reliance on this fancied strength. It’s madness to talk of running away yet. You must wait some months, at least. Besides, where will you go? To the Grange?”

“Never!” Wilford answered, firmly.

“Where then?” asked the Doctor, rather anxiously.

“To London.”

“What will you do there? I see you are tired of our dull rural life. You want gayer society. The racket and whirl and desperate brilliancy of London.”

“No. For my part I could be content to remain here for ever. But that, you know, Doctor, cannot be.”

“ But the Grange——”

“ Is not mine. Have I a right to tax Steenie—to be a perpetual burthen to him? If it were even right that I should do so, still I have some pride left. Could I bear to live as his dependent? However kindness might veil it, the fact would be unchanged—tenant of a house not my own, in sight of lands lost to me by my own folly—yes, and sin. Is that the position you would ask me to accept? Is it one I ought to accept? Put my father’s will out of the question—though some thought might be given to that, to its spirit and to its letter—ask yourself if it would become me, still young, gaining strength day by day—of mind, let us hope, as well as body—to become dependent upon my younger brother, and take toll, as it were, of property fairly his, and his

children's after him. Could I do this honourably—honestly?"

The Doctor evaded the question.

"What do you propose to do?" he asked, in a low voice.

"I will resign the name of Hadfield, lest—lest I bring further shame upon it. I will leave here for London; I will work for my living: I will try to win a good name for myself, and to make that name respected; I will toil heart and soul—with my intellect if I can—with this right arm should that fail me."

"Why, these are the strange schemes you entertained before your illness," exclaimed the Doctor, gravely.

"Yes, the same."

"I thought to have cured all that."

"Do you think that during my long

suffering upstairs, I have not thought of these things over and over again? Do you fancy I was lying there mindless—a mere log? Do you think I have not thoroughly worked out these plans in my mind? If they were founded on error, surely I had time and opportunity then to detect it. They have been thoroughly winnowed, trust me. Had they been wholly worthless you should have heard no more of them—indeed, there would have been no more to tell of them. But they are right and true. You know it, good friend."

"No, no, I know nothing of the kind; I think them all stuff and nonsense, and egregious folly, and I'm sorry the medicine I have given you hasn't done you more good. I thought it would have cleared your brain of these mad

cobwebs. I little thought while you were safe in bed upstairs that you were damaging your mind by turning over all these absurdities in it."

"Was I to learn nothing from the past, or the present? But," he added, with a strange nervousness, and the colour flushing his face, "if there should be another reason, a most powerful reason, for my leaving you——"

"I'll hear no more," said the Doctor, running away, "or by Heaven the boy will convince me against my will! Why, he's as obstinate as all the Hadfields put together. He's the worst of the lot—the Hadfields? Bah! as the old gentleman himself added to the sum of them."

"If he knew that I loved his daughter!" cried Wilford passionately; "would he not rather drive me from

his door than press me to remain? And I *do* love her! How good, how pure, how beautiful she is! Violet! dear Violet!" Then, after a pause, "And she—does she love me? Can it be? Oh, how unworthy I am of such happiness! Love me? Oh, God, if I thought that—but I must go, at once, and for ever. I must never see her more," and he buried his face in his hands, trembling very much.

Madge burst noisily, breathlessly, into the drawing-room, where Violet was busily at work with her needle.

"Oh, Vi! what do you think is going to happen? I was passing the parlour-door, and I couldn't help hearing. No, I wasn't listening on purpose, indeed I wasn't; only, of course, I ran off when papa came out, for I thought he might think I had been."

“What’s the matter, Madge?”

“Wait a moment, I’m rather out of breath. But Wilford——”

“What of him?” asked Violet, in an eager tone.

“I heard him say that——”

“Make haste, Madge dear.”

“Well, then, he’s going away, going to leave us!”

“To leave us?” Vi almost screamed.

“Yes. Oh, isn’t it a shame!”

“But when—when?”

“Immediately—as soon as he can—as soon as papa will let him. Why, what’s the matter, Vi? Don’t look like that! Speak, Vi, say something! Oh, how white she is!”

Violet had dropped her work to place her hands upon her heart. There was a strange look of suffering in her face: the colour quitted her cheeks—her lips;

half fainting, she was supported by her sister.

“Oh, Madge, if he should go!” she moaned in a very troubled voice.

Poor Madge was terribly puzzled at all this. She had never dreamt of her news, important although she had judged it, creating effects so marvellous. Vi moved in this way—Vi, her elder sister, so little susceptible of emotion as she had deemed her, who always checked demonstration of feeling as much as possible—who, as a rule, received her younger sister’s important communications with a calmness that had been only too provoking—Vi quivering like a lily in a tempest, and clutching Madge’s arm to save herself from falling! Why, it was like a dream—quite like a dream—and Madge was almost frightened at it!

“What is the matter, Vi dear?” she cried, as she assumed the *rôle* of protectress, playing it with much grace and with great heartiness, it must be admitted, hugging her elder sister closely and kissing her impetuously as though to bring the colour back to her pallid face.

“If he should leave me!” poor Violet continued to falter.

A new light seemed to shine upon bewildered Madge. Her child-heart seemed to be possessed of a new intelligence. It was as though she had by chance made a new and great discovery. Could it be really what she thought it was—what she had read of in books, and heard of from others, and sometimes pictured hazily and wonderingly to herself? Was this really what she fancied it must be? It was like—and

yet it was quite different! How strange! And Madge felt herself indeed a woman, as she put her red lips to Violet's ear —her heart beating terribly the while; her face a bright crimson—and murmured in soft, fond accents:

“Oh, Vi, you love him!”

And Violet buried her face on her sister's shoulder; and then, how silly, how absurd, how tender, how feminine, why, then of course the two dear creatures cried copiously, their arms twined tightly round each other!

They indulged with abandonment in that female panacea for a troubled state of the nerves and the sensibilities, “a good cry,” and emerged from it, a little tumbled it may be, with a decided crimson upon their eyelids, and yet a hint of it—it seems harsh to mention the fact with public opinion what it is

in regard to it—and after all it didn't detract a mite from their beauty—with just a tinge of the same colour about the region of their noses; and their hair, down, of course—and ruffled, till Madge's was like a furze bush in the shine of sunset.

But soon Violet recovered herself, smoothing her tresses and wiping away the tear-streaks on her cheeks; fanning herself with her handkerchief to cool her flushed face. Something of her customary calmness returned, while to it was added an earnestness that was new to her.

“Mind, Madge, dearest, you must never reveal a syllable of this to any one.”

“No, Vi, I never will. I solemnly promise.”

“Not to any one; not even papa—

certainly not to—to Wilford. I would not have him know it for the world."

"I'll be very careful, Vi."

"Thank you, Madge. Are my eyes very red? Do I look as though I'd been crying? I'll go up-stairs and bathe my face. Take great care, Madge, darling, what you say and do."

"I will; I will."

And Madge sauntered into the garden. Indeed there hardly seemed to be room for her in the house—she had grown so much taller during the last half-hour—such a sense of importance had come upon her. She was the depository of so tremendous a secret; she had passed from childhood to womanhood at one bound. She was a woman quite now—the confidant of another woman, and the other woman in love—and the other woman Vi, her elder

sister! and she, Madge, had discovered her sister's secret unassisted, all by herself, entirely of her own superior sagacity. She quite glowed with pleasure at this evidence of her cleverness. Vi in love! How strange—how nice—for all the world like a story-book—really in love—a romance in three volumes carrying on in the cottage, and she, Madge, a character in it—a sharer in the plot—an important person in the novel—the sister of the heroine—it was almost as good as being the heroine herself.

“And how will it end?” Madge asked herself. “Oh, in the proper way, of course. If Vi loves him, why, of course he must love Vi. How can he help it; and she so nice-looking and clever as she is? I’m sure there isn’t a prettier girl about here for miles than

my sister Vi, bless her! Why, there's Wilford in the garden! He's certainly handsome, though he is so thin. Well, I almost think that if Vi hadn't fallen in love with him, I should have."

What is the fascination about risk? Why do people love to skate on dangerous ice; to hover near the brink of precipices? Why did Madge, full of her sister's secret, long to prattle to Wilford Hadfield, and hover in her converse so close upon the confines of the secret? Yet there was an extraordinary charm for her in this. There was a consciousness of power and importance in thus talking with a man concerning whom she was in possession of information so important. It was unwise sport. Because the sense of her position was so new to her, it made her quite giddy; because the secret was

effervescently; it was difficult to stop babbling. She was like a bottle of sparkling Moselle with the wire off; the cork might fly out at any moment; her red lips might part, and the secret might be bubbling all over the place in no time.

She looked at Wilford and thought that he really ought to love sister Vi. And then came a tangle of thoughts. What relation would he be to her, Madge, supposing he married Vi? Oh, yes; why, brother-in-law, of course. And where would they live? and who would perform the ceremony? Oh, Mr. Mainstone of course, at Grilling Abbots Church. And how many bridesmaids ought there to be?—and would the bride wear a veil, or a watered silk bonnet and orange blossoms—how pretty! and so on.

“You’re not going to leave us, Mr. Wilford?”

“Yes, indeed, Miss Madge, I am.”

“I heard you say so in the parlour, but I don’t believe a word of it. Papa won’t let you go, and *I* won’t let you go ; and I’m quite sure that V——” and then she stopped suddenly, and turned down her eyes, for Wilford’s were fixed upon her rather curiously.

“Quite sure of what, Madge?”

“Nothing, only that you shan’t go away” (and she thought she had recovered from her trip rather cunningly), “why should you? You’re not well yet, for one thing ; you’re not half strong enough yet.”

“But I cannot stay here for ever, you know, Madge.”

“Why not? Aren’t you happy here? Can we do more to make you com-

fortable? Can I? can—" she stopped, blushing terribly.

"What does the child mean?" Wilford asked himself; "does she suspect me?"

"Should you miss me, Madge, if I were to go?"

"You know I should."

"And be sorry?"

"Very sorry. But you'd come back, wouldn't you, come back very soon?" Wilford shook his head.

"Never, Madge," he said.

"Never! You don't mean that? Never? Oh, how shameful, how cruel, how unkind!" and the tears glistened in her great blue eyes. "You'll leave us for ever? Oh, don't say that—don't say that—no—" and Madge forgot all caution—"no, not to Vi—not to Vi. Why, it would kill her. You cruel man!"

“Not to Violet? Again Violet,” Wilford murmured, and he grasped Madge’s hands and drew her towards him. “Why not to Violet?” he asked eagerly, trying to look into her face, which she hung down, burying her chin in her neck. “Tell me, Madge, quick.”

“Don’t ask me, please don’t. Oh, what have I said? and let go my hands; and let me go, do, there’s a good, kind Mr. Wilford.”

“Tell me, Madge. No, I won’t let you go, till you tell me.”

“Oh, I mustn’t—I mustn’t.”

“Would Violet be sorry?”

“Please don’t ask me; please don’t.”

“Would Violet be sorry? quick, quick.”

“Yes, I—I think she would.”

“More so than you—than any one?”

“Y—e—s.”

“She has told you so—she has said this herself?”

“Y—e—s—O! O! O! Let me go.”

And she bounded away—free—frightened—crying.

“How angry Violet will be; how cruel of him to make me tell him! What a little silly I’ve been!” and Madge began to think she had better have relied less on the strength of her newly-discovered womanhood; better have been still a child, even if she had gone that afternoon birds-nesting with Tommy Eastwood, as had been at one time proposed and settled between them.

“She loves me—she loves me!” And Wilford passed his hand across his damp forehead.

Another moment and with a radiant face he had passed into the house—into the drawing-room, where Violet, with partially-recovered placidity was sitting trying to work.

CHAPTER IX.

WILFORD'S WOOING.

“It is a very poor thing I offer you, Violet—the love of a ruined man; but, at least, that love is true, and whole, and earnest. Indeed, I never felt my ruin before; and if I wish for wealth now, it is only that I may lay it at your feet. I know how poor my claim is. I know how little I have done to merit your love. I know that my debt of gratitude to you is already more, far

more, than I can ever hope to repay. And yet, Violet, I am here—at your feet—to proffer you my heart, and to ask for yours. Give it to me. Give me a motive for life; give me something to make the future precious to me; not because of any deserving of mine, but out of your great goodness and pity. Do I pain you, Violet, talking like this? But indeed I can no more be silent; for I love you, Violet, and that love *will* find its way into words. It is my only claim; besides that, I have nothing. A broken, wearied man, just escaped from a wreck in which all fortune has gone down. With a mis-spent past, shattered in health, disinherited, fortuneless, there seems a madness and a wrong-doing about my quest. How can I dare to raise my hopes so high as you are, Violet? I cannot

justify myself. I cannot reason on the subject. I can only tell you that my love is honest and true. I swear to you that it is. I can only assure you that all man can do to make you happy, dear Violet, I will do. Bid me not despair wholly of winning you. Let me think that you will forget the past, that you will treat it as dead to both of us, and that in the future there may be yet some hope of happiness ; that you will permit my journey through life to commence anew from now, with you, Violet, by my side. How light it will seem ! How full of joy ! Never to look back ; to efface all memory of the past by the new life of the future ! May this be so, Violet ? Oh, say that it may ! ”

In some such hurried sentences, broken by emotion, impressive from the feverish

earnestness with which they were uttered, Wilford Hadfield told the story of his love.

“Madge has betrayed me,” thought Violet, as he began; and she was hurt at first—then appeased—then, as he went on, and his words and fervid tones stirred up strange echoes amongst the depths of her own heart, and the consciousness of her own love for him grew upon her more and more, what could she do but yield to the entrancement of his confession, and with her heart beating tumultuously, steal a soft white hand into his, and fall at last upon his shoulder, tearful, sobbing, crimson with blushes, in a half-swoon of happiness?

“You love me, Violet?” he cried.

He had set such a value upon her love, he could scarcely credit it could be his so readily. It had seemed to be so

far from him—at least he had so fancied it—that now, when it came quite near to him—was within his arm's length, as it were—he almost shrunk back, sceptical, paralysed, by a happiness he had thought too great to be real, to be other than imaginary. Just as in dreams of great joy, however real they may seem, the dreamer finds himself suspending his belief with the question :—“Are not these things too glorious to be true?” Indeed great happiness, like great misery, is dazzling, bewildering, stupefying. We cannot receive either on the instant wholly into our intelligences; we must take them piecemeal, and so at last get the entirety through the bars of our minds.

“ You love me, Violet? ” he repeated.

Was it necessary to ask the question ? Was he not sufficiently answered by those dark grey eyes, and the tears glistening

upon their lashes, like the morning dew upon the flowers? Was there not reply enough in the trembling parted lips, although no sound came from them?

“ You will ignore the past? ”

“ Always.”

“ And think only of the future? ”

“ Yes, Wilford.”

She was heard at last. Such a soft, timid voice.

A white scared face looked in for a moment at the door, and a pair of large blue eyes opened very wide indeed at what they beheld.

“ Perhaps I’d better keep out in the garden,” Madge Fuller murmured to herself. “ Perhaps I have not done so very wrong after all,” and then she concluded with the fearful proposition contained in the words—“ perhaps it’s as well to be indiscreet now and then.”

Soon after Wilford passed into Mr. Fuller's surgery.

"Doctor," he began, in a firm voice, "I told you just now that there was yet another reason why I should quit you."

"Are you going to worry me again about this matter, you obstinate boy?"

"You must hear me."

"Am I not safe even in my own surgery?"

"Doctor," Wilford went on seriously. "It would be wrong to conceal this thing from you for one moment longer than absolutely necessary." The Doctor looked at his patient, and perceived that he was decidedly in earnest.

"What do you mean, Wilford? Is there anything the matter?"

"This. I love your daughter, Violet."

"What!" cried the Doctor, amazed.

"I love your daughter. I believe that

love to be returned. I am here to ask your consent to our union."

The Doctor turned quite pale.

"You don't mean this?" he said.
"You're jesting, surely. No—you're not, though. There's no jesting in your face. But *can* this be? *You* love *Violet*?"

"Indeed I do. Is it not a reason why you should wish me hence? For I know how unworthy I am of her. But, oh! let it be a reason for my return—for my coming back here to make her mine!"

"I never dreamt of such a thing as this."

"Indeed I will endeavour to deserve her. Indeed I will devote my whole life to her happiness. Don't think of me as I have been. I am as a new creature henceforward. Indeed, Doctor, I am changed."

“But *you*, old Mr. Hadfield’s son, to marry the daughter of a country doctor! What will be thought of such a thing? What will they say at the Grange?”

“What will it matter what they say? Besides, don’t think of me as Mr. Hadfield’s son; think of me as I am: no more the heir to the Grange and the Hadfield lands; but cast-off, poor, penitent, and yet with a deep love in my heart for Violet! I regret my lost position only because I cannot ask her to share it. If I could ask her to be mistress of the Grange!”

“No, no; that could never have been! Bad enough as it is! quite bad enough. What will they say throughout Grilling Abbots?” and the Doctor wiped his forehead. “In what a situation you have placed me! Why,

all the old women in the town will rise against me! The tea-tables will be up *en masse!*"

"Doctor, Oh, thank you. I see you are relenting."

"I'm not indeed! I'm all in a fever. What I shall be charged with! They will say I brought you here on purpose. That I set a trap for the old Squire's son. By heavens! it is not to be borne. No, Wilford, you must go, I see that plain enough; but as for coming back again——"

"Yet, consider, Doctor, for Violet's sake—if she loves me——"

"Does she love you?" and Mr. Fuller rubbed his chin meditatively.

"She does."

"You're sure? You look so. Oh, Violet! I didn't believe you'd do such a thing."

“But, Mr. Fuller——”

“There—there—don’t talk to me. I must think it all over; it requires consideration; a very great deal of consideration. By-and-by I’ll tell you more about it. I’ll speak to you again. Now go, leave me, there’s a good fellow, let me have some peace. I’ve a heap of things to do, all sorts of medicines to make up. There—there—go.” And Wilford was gently pushed out of the room.

The Doctor paced up and down with long strides and unusual rapidity, crumpling up in his excitement a large, many-hued silk handkerchief to quite a ball in his hand.

“I’ve been an ass,” he said, “and that’s the simple truth. I ought to have foreseen all this. I ought to have known that some such thing as this was likely to happen. And yet I

never gave it a thought; and to see him so sad and ill and broken down as he was when he first came here, who would have expected him to fall in love with Violet? My dear, dear daughter Violet—so like her mother, too! I'm sure I can never part with her. It would quite break my heart. And yet,—if she loves him, as he says she does! It's my fault—it's all my fault for bringing him into the house! But I was so fond of him; I took to him quite as a boy somehow. I never had a son of my own; and he was such a bright, noble, handsome boy. Well, suppose he *did* quarrel with his father; the old man would be provoking enough when he chose, and irritating enough as I very well

know; and if he *did* leave home, and go a little wrong, and wild, and madcap, whose fault was it, I should like to know? Hardly all his own, hardly that. And he's poor now; people can't well say—yet they will, I feel sure—that he's much of a match for Violet, or any very great catch for her. Can I consent? Shall I give him my dear, good daughter—the little rogue—so quiet, and demure, and delicate, and in love all the while with this great, grim-looking man? Can I give her to him? Does he deserve it? Is he worthy of her? Well, well! Perhaps no man ever is quite worthy of a woman so pure and good as Violet is; at least I have never met such a one. It is very hard to know what to do. And if it should offend

the people at the Grange! Oh! we must be very careful about that. I must talk to Mrs. Stephen about it, I must be sure to ask her opinion upon the subject."

There was a tap at the door.

"May I come in?"

"Who's there?" and Violet entered.

"What's all this about, Vi? Is it true? I see it is. You love him? Oh, Violet!" She could only throw her arms round his neck, and kiss him impetuously.

"But we must do nothing without Mrs. Stephen, Violet. Her consent is even more important than mine."

"She is in the drawing-room, and she knows all," whispered Violet.

There was a rustle as of silk skirts, and Mrs. Stephen entered, bringing Madge with her.

“Dear me! what a crowd in the surgery!—for heaven’s sake take care of the bottles!”

“Oh, Mr. Fuller, I’m so delighted at what I have heard! You can’t think how pleased I am. My dear Violet—my dear Madge.” And thereupon the three ladies embraced each other affectionately, as the manner of their sex is in such cases. Men celebrate festive occasions with bottles of wine—women with numberless kisses.

“You give your consent, Mr. Fuller?”

“I don’t know what to say about it.”

“Oh, but you must. They love each other. Never was there a marriage that promised to be happier!”

“But it comes upon me so suddenly! I’ve had no time to think about it at

all. And Violet's very young. And Wilford's little better than an invalid. There can be no hurry. Yes; they must wait."

"Wait?" repeated Wilford, joining the group.

"Yes, a year; they must wait a year," the doctor said, determinedly.

"A year!" And Wilford glanced suspiciously round him, as though he dreaded that an intention existed to cheat him of his happiness.

"A year will soon fly away," Mrs. Stephen suggested, smilingly.

"Be it so," Wilford said, suddenly. "Yes, be it so; perhaps it will be better."

Had Violet looked to him to resist that postponement? If so, she acquiesced very soon in the arrangement. She came quite close to him.

"And if you *must* go, Wilford, if you *must* leave us for the present, you will write to me—you will be sure to do so,—you will write very often?"

"I will be sure to write, Violet."

The doctor looked almost scared at what he had done. He still seemed to cling to the *status quo*, like a timid bather afraid to let go the rope.

"But we must have Stephen's consent, remember, his unqualified consent."

"I'll answer for Stephen," said Gertrude Hadfield; and she whispered to the Doctor, "Do you know, Doctor, we were not unprepared for this? Steenie and I have often talked it over, hoping that it might come about. I thought of it directly I found Wilford recovering."

"The deuce you did," muttered Mr.

Fuller. "Why, it seems to me that everybody was prepared for it, and thought of it, excepting myself; I begin to think I grow quite thick-headed as I get older."

Madge thought her father looked rather melancholy. She went up and kissed him.

"You know, papa, *I* shall be left at home to take care of you, and attend to the house, and make tea and keep the keys of the store-room."

"Yes, Madge, and eat the jam in it," and Mr. Fuller shook his head in half-comical despair.

"Oh, but I shall be a year older," said Madge, with a blush, "and perhaps I shan't be so fond of jam then as I am now."

"Yes, there's a year to come—that's some comfort," groaned the Doctor.

Mrs. Stephen drove back to the Grange in her pony-carriage. She soon apprised her husband of all that had happened at the cottage.

"I'm sure it's a very happy thing," Mrs. Stephen commented; "Wilford ought to marry—of course he ought. Men ought all to marry. I'm sure it would be much better for them, and they would be a great deal happier, and it would keep them out of harm's way. I'm sure there wouldn't be half so much mischief, and irregularity, and wickedness in the world if there were more marriages." (Mrs. Stephen had tried the specific and found it answer in her own case.) "Wilford ought to consider himself very fortunate in having secured such a charming girl as Vi Fuller. Perhaps it would have been different

if your father's will hadn't been what it was; of course *then*—”

“Hush, my dear, don't say anything about that—it should not have altered the case.”

“I mean that *then* he might have looked higher. But she'll make him an admirable wife; and he'll forget all his troubles, and leave off moping and being miserable, and the rest of it. Was that one of the children crying?”

“No, my dear; besides, if it was, Nurse can see to it. I hope you have not over-exerted yourself,” &c., &c.

“A year will soon go,” said Wilford, as, some days later, he turned his back upon Grilling Abbots. “And she has promised to write very often.

Then,—a new name, a new life, and
Violet mine, there will yet be chance
of happiness in the future!"

And he journeyed towards London.

CHAPTER X.

TIME FLIES.

THERE is a certain well-understood though unexpressed convention, by virtue of which the world is bound to laugh at specific subjects. Jokes upon these are constantly "kept standing," as the printers call it, conveniently for the immediate use of the jester, never slow to avail himself of the advantage; for as necessary as air to ordinary and unjocose people, is laugh-

ter to the jester; and he prefers to obtain it surely by an old and well-trod road, rather than risk missing it on a path but newly discovered, however pleasant and inviting otherwise. There is often a doubt about the brand new coin—a golden egg, if I may so say, fresh laid by the Mint—it is suspicious-looking, it may be bad, it is so much brighter than usual; the thin well-thumbed, dull-shining sovereign, years in circulation, is infinitely preferred. And it is the same with jests: the old are honoured with the established laughter; the new are questioned, and their payment in grins frequently refused.

It seems to me (though of course it is too late in the day to say so now with a view to any alteration) that some of these subjects are rather ill-

chosen; are not really so provocative of honest mirth as the jesters w^ould have us believe; have a serious and sometimes painful side, which might fairly exempt them in a great measure from the incessant sallies and rallies of the facetious. Let me mention a few of the topics upon which the gentlemen with the caps and bells rely for the bringing down of the mirth and applause of their audience.

Widows — Bishops — Impecuniosity — Love-letters.

These four will do: though of course there are many more on behalf of which and in deprecation of cachinnation much might be urged; and even for all these I do not feel absolutely bound to enter the lists. I am not a Widow, nor am I a

Bishop. Perhaps I should only damage the cause of either by defending it; perhaps they are both strong enough to take care of themselves. For the Widow I will only say that, as a rule, I have found her situation to be more forlorn than facetious; while as to the Bishop, I could never for the life of me discover from a lay point of view any particular funniness about him—a comfortable and respectable dignitary, no doubt; but what does the community see to laugh at in that fact? I know not. Yet turn to the comic books: how many jokes have been cracked upon the venerable heads of the spiritual lords? It is past all counting. For Impenitence, let me confess that on occasions, when I have found my

banker's account to be at a very low figure, and perhaps the balance on the wrong side of the pass-book—for my credit is good, and I have been permitted to overdraw once or twice—when this has been so, let me hasten to state that I have derived distress and annoyance from the circumstance, and clearly not mirth and amusement. For Love-letters I may have something to urge. Perhaps in my time I may have written such things. Who hasn't? A long time ago.—Oh, yes, that of course!

Read over the last great love-case in the law reports, and you'll surely find that shrieks of laughter followed the putting in evidence of the letters of the poor wretches concerned. They were treated as quite new

and exceptional matters, purely funny ; it was as though nobody in court had ever heard before of such intensely comic things as love-letters ; as though they were brilliant conundrums, or laughable verses from the last burlesque ; as though the judge on the bench hadn't written such things himself in days gone by, or the counsel on either side, or the witnesses, or the jury, over and over again—everybody in court, down even to the lawyer's clerks, leering in the gulf between the bar and the judgment seat, not very loving or loveable-looking ; they are not handsome men, as a rule, are lawyer's clerks, any more than are low-church curates. Are those poor love-letters, then, really such fit subjects for jesting ? Granted that they are faded and crumpled and shabby-looking now ; the

passion that gave them preciousness and vitality clean gone from them; that they are as graceless and unattractive as a balloon with the gas out of it, as illumination lamps blown out at daybreak, as a bottle of hock a week without its cork, “stale, flat, unprofitable;” but may we not reverence things typically—not for what they are, but for what they represent—for their past value, not their present? The love may be gone, but at least it was good and true while it lasted; let us gather up its relics then with respectful hands, and lock them up safely, not toss them about with a snigger, nor hand them to Betty for the dustbin or the fireplace, or to wrap her curls in at bedtime.

I know that it is the fashion to sneer at Love nowadays, and the

stress the fiction-writer has often laid upon it. For certainly he has been prone to think that often in a man's life there has been a time when such an event as a strong mastering passion has given to his career permanent warp and change and colour; an important fact to look back at and date from in after years, like the Deluge in the world's history. But this is not so, it seems, and the novelist was wrong. "There are no more grand passions, now," says old Fitznoddy, of the Narcissus Club, Pall Mall, "any more than there is good port wine—they went out together." And he represents a general opinion. You mustn't look to Fitznoddy for individuality. Henceforward, then, there should be a list of errata added

to all books. You must now, for every time *amour* occurs read *amourette*. Cupid is no more the one plump, glorious, mottled, rosy god whom it was a joy to hug tight to one's heart; he is split up into a squad of miserable, tiny pauper children, very skeleton-like, all sharp corners and hard edges, whom one holds comfortlessly in one's arms—and with difficulty too—like a bundle of fire-wood with the string cut. The heart is a mere musical instrument—woman turns the handle, and it plays its airs punctually, like a barrel-organ. And these are always the same: there is no variety of emotion. And we court Chloe at forty, to the same tune with which we deluded Daphne at twenty.

Can this be so? Has the old, great, strong, insensate passion of youth

really past away? Well, it may be so, for youth has gone, too. Life takes great strides now. There is but one step from childhood to middle age, which begins now, I fancy, at eighteen, while senility sets in probably at thirty. The age loves suddenness—it has suppressed transitional periods; the world would abolish twilight if it could. One day we are in the nursery, and the next ordering hair-dye or being measured for wigs. The pace is tremendous. Last week there were some children prattling on my knee: this week to hear them talk, makes me feel quite an old man—ay! old and foolish.

It will excite little surprise, then, after this, when I say that I adhere very much to the old story-telling creed; that I believe very much in

the love, one and indivisible. It may be a dream—let me have it. It may be that the hero of the novelists is not quite so white as he has been painted. Turn to the courageous master romancist. May there not be true love for beautiful Sophy Western, even though there has been—before, or after, or the while—some dalliance with naughty Molly Seagrim? “All men are beasts!” says a single lady of great age whom it is my privilege to know. The criticism is severe: but, at least, men are mortal—the leaven of fallibility is very strong in them; they may come down now and then from the pedestals on which they are often mounted in books; but there is good in them, too, and virtue and bravery and truth. We need not be always pointing to the blue vein in the

marble; we need not insist that all coats should be worn with the seamy side out; let us believe in heroes and heroines, though they eat mutton-chops like other people; and in their loves and their love-letters, though perhaps the love has passed from these last, like the scent from the paper, and the hands that penned them may be churchyard dust. Do we admire lovely woman the less for knowing that she wears frisettes in her hair and crinoline under her skirts? No. Perhaps the more for these evidences of her mortality. We should be frightened at her very likely if she were really an angel; all our talk to her on the subject to the contrary notwithstanding.

I have digressed. I know it. This chapter is much by way of *entr'acte*. For there is a lapse of time here in

the story, and the months are fleeting as I write. A convenient opportunity seemed to offer for pause and a word or two upon the present view of sentiment; especially as this is not quite in accordance with certain notions contained in this story and set forth in a measure by its characters. They, be it said, believe in love, as did the world, I think, before perhaps matrimony, the climax of love, was, to use a vulgarism, "blown upon" by the Divorce Court. And I wanted to set out here two letters, out of many that about this time passed between Wilford Hadfield and Violet Fuller; and it seemed to me, regard being had to the prevalency of certain opinions, that it behoved me to prepare the mind of the reader for the reception of these documents. I wanted, in fact, to avoid

the accustomed roar when love-letters are tendered as evidence in a case.

The letters are very simple, yet full, as it seems to me, of a great affection, of a deep tenderness; there is no effort in them, no desire to attitudinize in them on the part of the writers, and so delude each other after the manner of people who don't love. I select them hap-hazard out of a heap. They are not written in the first burst of the discovery of passion, but later in the day, when they had taken that for granted, and between them had established a firm substratum of love and faith to which it was hardly necessary for them further to refer.

“Plowden Buildings, Temple.

“MY DEAREST VIOLET,

“What a relief it is to turn

from my books and once more to write to you! I look forward all through the day to this moment: and the harder I have toiled the better seems my claim to send you a long letter. Does not this act of letter-writing really bring us nearer together? I am sure I feel that the space between us is now, by some miles, less than what it was this morning. I seem to have travelled through my work, and so brought myself closer to you. Perhaps it is that I may now permit myself to think wholly and exclusively of you, and that my thoughts circle round you and draw you to me as I write. I hear your voice, I know its every charming accent. I look up and see your kind eyes. I stretch out my arms, and I fancy there

is little to prevent my grasping your soft white hands. I almost think that if I were to pronounce your name aloud—‘Violet! ’—I should somehow hear your dear voice answer me. My heart beats quite noisily at the idea of such a thing. How I wish this were all so in reality! How I long to learn yet once more from your own lips that you love me! I can never tire of hearing you say those words. They can never seem monotonous to me—but always new and beautiful, and magical. I am almost angry with each of your letters that does not contain them explicitly—implication is not sufficient. I should like the precise words written large at the beginning of each letter, and again large at the end. I think

that would satisfy me. Oh! if you knew how happy the thought of your love makes me, Violet—what value it gives to my future—how great a change it has made in me in every way! I sometimes pause, wondering if all can be true. Is there this leaven of doubt about all joy? Do those who are happy always stop to question their position and plague themselves with inquiries? ‘Is it real—is it true? Will it last?’ But I have been so well acquainted with misery, I have, perhaps, bought a right to be incredulous about happiness.

“Do I weary you with all this? Pray forgive me if I do. Indeed I try to conquer all my doubts and misgivings. I try to forget. I try to look forward simply and trustingly.

Yet in all my letters, I feel there are many lines like those I have written above—made up of self-examinations and forebodings, which must give you pain to combat over and over again. But you always triumph, Violet—at any rate, for a long time—and I hope that the enemy is growing weaker, less frequent in his attacks, and that in the end you will vanquish him altogether.

“Do not all my letters commence something in this way? Do you not rely for certain upon a particular number of lines of wildness and absurdity and unreason before you get to more serious and sober matters? But in beginning to write to you a sort of tumult of emotion seems to carry me out of myself. I cannot instantly concentrate my ideas. I feel

dizzy and unnerved with thoughts of you. It would be the same if I were now to see you here—at a moment's notice. The joy would be almost too much for me. I should be dumb for some minutes. I should feel everything to be swimming round me; and I should fall at your feet overwhelmed by the wondrous magic of your presence. So, in writing to you, my hand quite trembles and my heart is terribly restless; the love surges up in me till I feel half mad with it, and I have to wait a little till I grow more accustomed to its violence.

“Very extravagant all this, isn’t it, Violet? And I fancy those charming deep grey eyes looking mildly reproachful, and a smile that would be critical if it wasn’t so tender stealing along the lines of your lips. I ought to be

calm. I ought to study to conceal emotion more. I ought not to surrender myself to these paroxysms of feeling. Quite right. The more so because you, I know, dear one, believe rather in quietude, which is not always earnestness, though the one sometimes represents the other; but perhaps it is difficult to believe that fever and excitement may be anything more than effervescence after all.

“There: I am still now, my hand shakes no more. Don’t you perceive a difference in the writing? I can bear now calmly to contemplate my happiness, and to think of you placidly, Violet. I remember that I am a gentleman very near middle life (I am, Vi, though you persist in contradicting me!), with a great many grey hairs, (I have them, though you are so wil-

fully blind on the subject, and *will* ignore them !), living up a good many pairs of stairs in the Temple, studying law. I ought to conduct myself soberly—if anybody ought.

“I have given up my lodgings in Bury Street. They were a useless extravagance. We agreed upon that, did we not? and economy is to be the order of the day henceforward. My old friend, George Martin—of whom I have written to you before, and whom I have begged you to like when you see him, if only for my sake—but I am sure you will like him for his own—has been kinder than ever. He has insisted upon my taking up my abode with him, has made room for me in his chambers, and will have it that for some time to come I shall have no want of any other lodgings or

rooms of whatever kind. What could I do but comply with an offer so generous? You must like him! He is so genial and frank, and yet so calm and self-contained withal. Isn't that a recommendation, Vi? He is a little older than I am—handsome, with marked features—a high bald forehead—he declares he lost his hair at twenty-three—and a wonderful smile. He has been called to the bar some years, but he does not practise; he is engaged in literary pursuits, and is a highly accomplished and most worthy gentleman. He writes constantly in the — and — Journals, and has been most kind in obtaining work for me. It was through his introduction that my paper appeared in the — Magazine; the paper you admired so kindly (you don't know what an incen-

tive to work your admiration is, Vi), and which Madge thought a little heavy. She likes 'funnier kind of things,' does she? I am afraid I cannot manage to be very comical, but I'll try, if it be only for her sake, and she shall be at liberty to laugh quite as much at as with me. Can I do more to please her? I am sorry that I found it necessary to speak unfavourably of the new comic novel she admired so much. Tell her, if she likes, she shall herself review the author's next work.

"Will you take Martin's evidence in my favour? He says there is no reason why I should not take high literary rank, or attach to my name a most creditable share of literary fame. I try to believe this. Do you, Vi? How happy it would make me could I think myself in any way more worthy of you!

The disparity between us is too fearful at present. But, there, I will say no more. I know you have already expressed strong disapprobation at what you call my absurd system of undue exaltation of you and depreciation of myself.

“Good-night, Violet, and good-bye. I look out of window at the calm moon, and wonder whether it is shining into your face as it is into mine: and what you are doing and saying. But, probably, you are in bed long ago, and fast asleep. Has your last thought to-night been of me as mine will be of you? A lovely night. I see the Thames from my window reflecting the stars, and the lamps on the bridge. A lovely night; and in its hush and beauty—with my mind full of thoughts of you—I seem to be nearer to you

than ever, and to love you more; but that is hardly possible. Good-night! God preserve and bless you, and make you love me, and me worthy of your love. Good night, again, my own dearest Violet!

“Yours ever,

“WILFORD.”

“Grilling Abbots.

“DEAREST WILFORD,

“*I love you!* Will that do, you restless, impatient man? Or am I to write the words over and over again, beginning and ending every line with them? But if you will not, as you say, though I doubt the fact,—if you will not tire of reading them, don’t you think I shall of writing them? When will you give over these doubtings and misgivings? I was in hopes from your former letter that you had quite got rid of your old melancholy. Why

did you let it come back to plague you? You frighten me sometimes by the way in which you write to me. Why should you fear that I should cease to love you? Why should I change? What is there in me or in my words that should make you think that I do not know my own mind—that I am feeble, uncertain—that some time or other I shall cease to love you? No, dear Wilford, that will never be. Pray believe it, now and for ever. I have given you my heart past all taking back again; still more, past all giving to another. *I love you!* There, *Monsieur*, be content. I have written the words again, and they are true words,—indeed, indeed they are.

“I did not intend to write this sort of letter, I wanted to be quiet

and composed;—yes, sir, and 'perhaps prosy. It is your fault that I fall away from my good intentions. But I read over again your impetuous sentences. I find your trouble and emotion to be contagious. I, too, find my cheeks glowing and my hand trembling. You see what mischief you occasion; you disturb not merely yourself but me also, what have I done that I should be treated in such a way? But I forgive you. Is not that magnanimous? There—and I have kissed the paper just where I am writing; you kiss there, too, and consider yourself pardoned, provided that you never offend any more in the same way.

“I have no news, except that we all liked your paper in the —. Even Madge, who still thinks you might be *lighter*, was pleased; and papa,

though he did not say much, took the paper into the surgery, and, I'm sure, read it over many times quietly and enjoyed it immensely. I feel so happy when I hear you praised. Can you account for that in any way? I like to think that the world is beginning to open its eyes to your great merits: but for Heaven's sake, Wilford, don't be tempted to overwork yourself. I am quite sure that you are not too well yet, for all your talk to the contrary. Be careful, mind. I'm certain I shall like Mr Martin, your friend, and especially if he does not tempt you to sit up too late or to fatigue yourself unnecessarily!

“I am rather tired to-day, for we went last night to a party at the Eastwoods. Madge desires me to say that it was *quite* a grown-up party, and

almost a ball. Tommy Eastwood wore a tail-coat, and blushed superbly when he asked Madge to dance. But he's such a nice boy—it's quite a shame to laugh at him, and we're all going to mend in that respect. Madge looked *so* pretty—you don't know how proud of her I felt. She wore a white rose from your favourite tree, I may tell you, in her hair, which I think—and so do you, don't you?—to be beautiful in colour, though the people here (*except, perhaps, T. Eastwood, Esq.*) do not appreciate it. Round her neck was that grand gold chain you were so good as to give her. I love you very much, sir, for loving my darling Madge. You can't think how nice she looked. Her dress was white tarratlan, very full, of course (don't laugh, sir), without trimming of any kind.

The whole effect was charming, and you should have seen her eyes—so beautifully blue—so sparkling with happiness! I think I have never seen any one so pretty as my sister Madge; and she's as good as she's pretty, as you very well know, and T. E. ought to consider himself very happy—but there! I quite forgot, there is to be no more joking on *that* subject.

“And how was I dressed? I suppose you will be sufficiently interested to inquire. Well, then, I did not have a new dress—economy is the order of the day, as you very well remark, and I wore my pink *glacé* silk, which looked very well, and I did not dance much, but played for the *young* people—was not that right?—and I sung

all my best songs, and I enjoyed myself tolerably, wishing very much that you had been one of the party.

“Mrs. Stephen calls constantly, and is most kind. She brought over the baby to see us only this morning. It is such a lovely child, and *so* good—it never cries—and it has quite the Hadfield expression. Are you determined that it shall not be called after you? Do you know that Gertrude is very angry about that? and she scolds *me*! as if I was anybody, or could do anything. I am very fond of Gertrude—the more I see of her the more I like her; you may think her a little cold at first, but that notion wears off, and indeed it is not founded upon truth. Stephen is teaching Madge to ride—she looks so well upon the white pony!

—but I think she is really rather frightened, although she would rather die, I believe, than admit it.

“Agnes and Saxon are growing quite tall; they are coming to see us tomorrow; they are nice children, but just a trifle spoiled. Agnes is learning her notes under my tuition; her ear is wonderfully good, and I think she will in time be able to play very nicely. On Friday we are going to tea at Mr. Mainstone’s, and papa will accompany us. I’m sure it will do him good. He keeps on saying that he grows too old to go out in the evening, unless he is quite obliged, but I know he will enjoy a gossip with dear old Mr. Mainstone. Shall you feel jealous if I tell you I think the old clergyman a very charming person indeed?

“There, I have exhausted quite my stock of news, and tried your patience, very likely; yet—no, I don’t really think that. I am sure that what interests me will interest you also in a great measure. Yet these small events in Grilling Abbots must look smaller than ever to you in London, where everything seems to be on such a colossal scale. Surely there are only *masses* in town—never individuals. How far you are from us! But don’t look at our occurrences through the small end of your telescope—magnify them, and you will be nearer to us—well, then, to *me*! I believe you prefer that I should say that. Adieu, dearest. Madge sends her love—she says *respects*, but she does not mean that. Papa sends all sorts of kind messages. He declares, if you won’t say anything about

your health, that he will send up all sorts of physic on the chance of your needing it. Adieu. And I—well—I *love* you! Will that do?

“Dearest Wilford, yours ever,

“VIOLET FULLER.”

These samples of the lovers' letters will suffice; there were many more of them, however.

Wilford worked hard in London—seldom leaving it—taking few holidays. He was in Paris for little more than three days, but the visit was for the most part on business.

A year after his wooing he went down to Grilling Abbots and wedded—a most quiet wedding—early in the morning at Mr. Mainstone's church. The whole business was over and the happy pair had almost left the place

before Grilling Abbots became conscious of what had happened.

“My dear sister, for you are *now* really my sister,” said Mrs. Stephen as she kissed the blushing bride, “be sure that you bring Wilford back to the Grange.”

They left Grilling Abbots behind. The doctor threw the old shoe after them for luck with most boisterous merriment; but he sobered and saddened suddenly, locking himself up for some hours in the surgery, after the departure of his darling daughter, Violet.

Madge dried the tears which were dimming her blue eyes.

“How dreadfully dull the house will be without them,” she said. Then she assumed her new office. She rattled her keys as though to remind herself of the authority now vested in her, and

she determined to visit the store-room just to count the jam-pots, and for no other reason. Certainly not.

CHAPTER XI.

A GALLERY OF PICTURES.

IN this country the infant mind at an early stage of its development is made acquainted with two important propositions; one being that Idleness is the root of all Evil; the other, that the English are naturally an Industrious People. These are impressed upon the youthful student by that system of iteration which seems to be the great secret of education. He daily writes

the one in his copy-book, and reads the other from his Guy's Geography, until he is generally supposed to be impregnated with them, and as a result to believe in both "most powerfully and potently." It should be rather said, however, not so much that he accepts as that he does not refuse these axioms; or, at the most, that he receives them with that intellectual lethargy and languid unquestioning, that suspension of mental activity, which forms a large part of faith and conviction, or what passes for such, all over the world. For it appears to be held that men have a vital belief, and they are so credited, provided they have not already debited themselves with a lively and proclaimed Pyrrhonism.

A consequence of this state of things is that there are no recognized drones

in Great Britain's hive. Though all are not equally industrious, all affect to be equally busy, and so the respectability of the thing is apparently well maintained. If you are determined to be lazy, you must be so behind a screen. Be idle if you will, only don't profess idleness. The nation does not object to compromise the matter. Indeed, as a rule the popular notion of virtue in general is that it is a fair subject for compromise. Like legal gin, virtue is not required by society to be above, while there is no limitation as to how much it may be under, a certain proof. A little adulteration is rather desirable; in its integrity the article might almost be recommended by a shopkeeper, as "well adapted for mixing purposes." Few take it "neat;" it so unfits them for the business of life; and some are

satisfied with a very considerable dilution. Be idle, but have an excuse. Eat your dinners and call yourself a barrister, or enter the army for some two months, or engage a studio and pretend you follow the fine arts; or, if you live in the country, become a J.P., and maintain your respectability by twice a year damning a peasant as a poacher. Wear a mask; you need not mind how thin it is; hide your head in the sand like the ostrich, and the world, more obliging than the bird's foes, will concede that your whole body is admirably concealed. Shams are now and then abused, but they are dearly loved for all that; and they are indispensable to civilization. Look at a prince affecting to be a bricklayer, and laying the first stone; how he messes about with the silver trowel, and how the public applauds him—how it glories in the

scene ! Certainly shams are great institutions ! Are all great institutions shams ?

But it is not only in the higher circles that people pretend to be busy as an excuse for doing nothing. Royalty plays at soldiering and sailoring ; our nobility follow the pursuit of legislation—there are certainly some very unbusiness-like senators ; gentlemen of fortune bob their heads for one day in the law courts, and are burthened with a wig-box and the title of barrister for the remainder of their natural lives (what would some of these do—how angry they would be—supposing anybody were to send them a brief!) ; very superior creatures have entered the army for the express purpose of retiring from it ; there have been even clergymen who don't preach, and can't cure souls ; perhaps doctors who heal for love and not for fees. And it is the

same through all the strata of society. The analogy fits to every rundle of the ladder. There are plenty of persons, for instance, who keep shops by way of becomingly doing nothing. I have heard of crossing-sweepers whose avocation was a mere pretence—men of fortune, they held the broom from no regard for halfpence; simply because it behoved them to assume the semblance of industry; because they had heard the statements that Idleness was the root of all Evil, and that the English were an Industrious People, and knew that as citizens they must act accordingly.

It cannot be supposed that all the shops in London are remunerative. Of course not. Many of them are tradesmen's follies in disguise, excuses for idleness; sometimes even expensive hobbies. As he cannot do nothing as a non-

practising advocate or parson, or a retired soldier, the shopkeeper with a taste for idleness does nothing as a shopkeeper. I am about to introduce the reader to a shop and shopkeeper of this kind.

Soho Square had not been wholly handed over to trade, and many neighbouring streets had been only partially disfigured by shops. But the neighbourhood was steadily on the decline. Private houses were emptying—were in decided decadence. As a symbol of fall, there were here and there tablets affixed between the parlour windows, inscribed with trade announcements; it was as though the houses had been marked out for destruction. By-and-by, parlour windows were abolished; the front was taken off the lower part of the house; for a day or two it remained like that—a ghastly object with an open wound; then came

the inevitable, unmistakable shop window. Gentility was dethroned for ever: Commerce reigned in its stead.

On the door of one of the houses in Freer Street, the right-hand side of the way going from Soho Square, was the name of "J. Phillimore." No mention of a trade followed this name, nor had the ground-floor windows been blended into a shop-front. Yet it was evident that some kind of business was supposed to be carried on in the house; decidedly an impression to that effect was sought to be conveyed. For in one of the windows was a very black oil-painting, of small size and without a frame, that looked as though it had been steeped in treacle. In the other window stood a carved frame, black with age, but without a picture; and it was not large enough for the picture in the window

first mentioned. There was a background of green baize to these properties. What trade was carried on by Mr. Phillimore? If you had asked his neighbours they would have informed you that Mr. Phillimore was a picture dealer; and they would have considered that such an answer afforded you ample instruction on the subject.

It hardly did that. Mr. Phillimore kept a shop for the express purpose of doing nothing in it. He had not dealt in pictures for very many years; he never intended to deal in pictures again. He no more contemplated selling the picture and the frame in his windows, symbolizing his supposititious trade, than a gold-beater reckons upon an offer to purchase the gilded arm and hammer projecting from his first floor. There were one or two other pictures in the

front room, which was not fitted up in the least like a shop; these also were rather treacly in hue, and quite French polished in surface, but were no more for sale than the ordinary fittings of the parlour of a private family. Mr. Phillimore lived on the premises. He was rich enough to retire from business, perhaps, but not rich enough to retire from his shop. So he resided in Freer Street, doing nothing; but in compliance with social requirements previously alluded to, affecting to be a tradesman—pretending to deal in pictures.

It was a comfortable room, with a Turkey carpet, a red flock paper, a bronze chandelier, antique chairs, and a mirror set in carved oak over the fireplace. The room at the back was its counterpart, only that it was smaller.

Mr. Phillimore occupied the back room as a matter of preference. It was less cheerful than the other. It looked on to a water-butt, and had a fine prospect of slated roofs and outbuildings and kitchen chimneys. But perhaps he had never been able to divest himself altogether of the notion that the front room was, after all, strictly speaking, a shop; while no such impeachment could in any way attach to the back-parlour. And he became the rooms, did Mr. Phillimore; for he too was comfortable-looking—a prosperous man leading a cosy, methodical, enjoyable life; a bachelor, without the slightest intention of ever changing his condition. A bald-headed man, with yet a half-chaplet of rather long grey hair, and sometimes a jaunty velvet cap to hide his baldness, for he considered and cultivated his

appearance. Round rosy features, a twinkling black eye, dark eye-brows, a portly figure, carefully dressed. He always wore black, a complete suit, with a dress coat, a stiff, white neckerchief, and a frilled shirt adorned with a large brooch. A man came regularly to shave him early in the morning, after which he breakfasted in a superb brocaded dressing-gown; then he read the paper scrupulously; at mid-day he assumed the whitest cravat, and thrust his neat feet into the brightest boots that could be discovered for miles. He was then dressed for the day. He took most delicious snuff from a grand gold box; he smoked occasionally very fragrant tobacco from a gorgeous pipe, silver-mounted and with a china bowl, exquisitely painted. He had in his cellar some of the nicest port wine (in pints)

that ever was tasted. Mr. Phillimore led altogether a very snug Sybaritic life in the back-parlour behind his counterfeit shop.

He was walking up and down the front room in a reflective sort of way, to the music of his massive watch-key and seals rattling before him, and the money jingling in his pockets. He hummed an air of an operatic character now and then for his own amusement. He had a prosperous *abandon* about him altogether that was indeed charming.

A knock at the street door.

Mr. Phillimore peeped furtively over the green baize screen, the background of the picture in the window.

“I thought as much,” he said. And he went out into the passage. “Never mind, Sally,” he cried over the kitchen stairs; “I’ll open the door.”

“Good morning, sir,” he said, in a frank, cordial way to a gentleman who stood on the doorstep. “Pray walk in. He’s not come home yet, but I expect him every minute. Step in,” and Mr. Phillimore led the way into his front room. The gentleman,—tall, handsome, with a pleasant smile,—evidently amused, followed him.

“Do you know, sir,” Mr. Phillimore began. “Do you know, sir—Mr.—Martin, I think?”

“Yes, Martin.”

“Do you know, Mr. Martin, that you are singularly like a Lawrence?”

“Indeed,” said Mr. Martin, with a puzzled expression.

“Yes. I’ve seen a great many of Sir Thomas’s heads that were very much less in his own manner, and very much less worthy of him than

yours is. Quite the Lawrence eye—bright and piercing, and the Lawrence lips, beautifully drawn, with a dimple at each end of them. Yes, you're undoubtedly a very fine example of Sir Thomas, in very nice preservation. My remarks astonish you, perhaps?"

"Well, they strike me as a little unusual."

"But they're not rude, believe me; and they are distinctly true—they have that merit. You see, in the course of a career of some length as a picture dealer, a great number of works have passed through my hands; in fact, I think, I have almost seen as many painted semblances of my fellow creatures, as I've seen real human beings, and I cannot resist classifying them. My trade instincts get the better of me, and I refer them all to their proper schools.

For myself, now,"—and Mr. Phillimore inspected his plump face in the glass over the fire-place—"I am Dutch, decidedly—quite in the Flemish manner. I might be a Von Tilberg, or an Ostade, or a Brauwer. Portrait of a Burgo-master. I should look very well like that in a catalogue; a little change of dress, a velvet cloak with a fur collar, a gold chain or so, and I should be perfect. And Sally! You've seen our servant Sally here? Well, old Sally is a perfect Rembrandt—a delicious example—she ought never to be touched, much less cleaned; just a little dusting now and then with a silk handkerchief, that would be quite sufficient. They've taken to spoiling her upstairs under the notion of smartening her up. They mean well, but it's a great mistake. She's worth any money as she is. She's

got the right snuffy sort of shadow under her nose, and all her wrinkles are in the most superb *impasto* you ever set eyes upon. And our friend upstairs, mind you, is a very respectable Velasquez, very respectable indeed, fit for any gallery, or," and Mr. Phillimore mused a little, "he might almost be Zurburan. With a particular kind of glazing, he'd even be taken for a Spagnolotto, and by no means a bad specimen of the master."

"And the lady?"

"Ah! the lady's charming: Raphael-esque, isn't she? beautiful I call her. If she's not a genuine Raphael,—there are very few genuine Raphaels,—she's a fine production of the school of Raphael. She's the lovely brow and liquid grey eyes, with the beautiful high light in them. Not raw paint, mind; but the

most tender demi-tint—exquisite! She was too much for me—quite too much for me. I gave in at once. You see, you don't often have a real Raphael—even an approach to one—knocking at your street door. What could I do? My lodgers had all been single men before. I thought I preferred single men. I thought my Rembrandt in the kitchen preferred single men; but when *she* wanted to take the apartments, what could I do but let them to her? I never thought to have had so splendid a specimen of the Italian School so near me. And that's two years ago—and she's as good as ever; the colour hasn't gone down a bit. That's the thing with the old masters—they're so sound—no mistake about them—last beautiful for ever! Almost improve with keeping, like good wine.

You wouldn't care to take port before your dinner, or I think I could give you a nice glass. None of your tawny, dry, thin stuff, but old, with a grand body and a heavenly bouquet. That's the port-wine I like. We must have a bottle together some day, I know you'll like it. You don't get such wine as that every day. No one does. Yes," and Mr. Phillimore resumed the thread of his discourse, "I feel with these people in my house that my collection is almost unique. I don't really know where it could possibly be matched. And then, last year, they had a friend to stop with them, a friend from the country, a young lady——"

"A sister?"

"A sister of Raphael's Madonna, I believe she was; Madge they called her. Exceedingly charming. I had great dif-

ficulty in classing her. Sometimes I thought she was a Lancret; and there were moments when I even regarded her as a Greuze. The woman is very beautiful who carries into womanhood the beauty of infancy. You see that frequently in Greuze: though he often spoils it with his Frenchness; he *will* sometimes make his child-women *conscious*—a cruel mistake. She was very delightful, was the sister of Raphael's Madonna."

Mr. Martin bowed his acquiescence. He was amused and yet puzzled with the picture-dealer. He found it difficult to conceive that it was only for this he had been drawn into the ground-floor room. But he entered thoroughly into the spirit of his new friend's humour.

"And the baby?" he asked with a smile.

“ Well, the baby.” And Mr. Phillimore paused as though the baby were a very serious subject indeed. “ Who’d have thought of a baby being born in this house! I wonder the authorities didn’t refuse to register the birth. By Jove! they’d have been almost justified; upon a *primâ facie* view the thing might well seem impossible. But when you once break through a rule, when you once give up a sworn determination to have only single men lodgers, you must be prepared to take the consequences, even though they should assume the form of babies! And do you know a baby isn’t, after all, so black as it’s painted; the idea is, after all, frequently worse than the actuality. I am a bachelor—I intend to remain so—there’s no fear of my altering my mind in that respect—don’t mistake me. I have brought

myself up in the bachelor creed that a baby was a bore, a nuisance, a horror; and that its cries were distressing, agonizing, maddening. There's been exaggeration in the matter. I don't mind the baby upstairs, bless you! not a bit. I don't *like* its crying, I confess; but I don't mind it much. It's nothing to what I thought it would be! and then its chuckle and crowing are certainly pleasant. I don't think Infancy has ever had credit sufficient given to it in those respects. To think of the Rembrandt downstairs taking to the baby as she has! It's wonderful. Somehow women seem to me to get intoxicated with babies, just as if they were so much grog. They pretend they don't care for them at first, and would rather not, and then they begin

to sip; and, finally, go regularly mad about them. You should hear my Rembrandt talking nonsense to the baby for hours together, and dancing it about, and rocking it till she must be tired to death; but she'd rather go on till she dropped, than give way to anybody else, bless you! It's extraordinary what an influence a baby has in a house; rules it, quite. Why, do you know, that one day when the baby was ill, or they thought it was (I think, myself, that babies often pretend to be ill just to assert themselves, and test their authority), well, they thought the child had a croop-cough, or something of that sort; and I could not get Sally to clean my boots! No, not for any money, I couldn't. She was too busy with the baby; and what's more I submitted to it. I did, upon my word! I

wore dirty boots all that day, for the first time in my life!"

"Ah! Mr. Phillimore, you ought to have been a married man, and a father," said Mr. Martin, laughing.

"Do you think so?" and the picture-dealer mused over the observation. "Somehow it never occurred to me to be so."

"But the baby considered as a work of art——"

"Flemish, at present. Oh! very Flemish. Between you and me" (Mr. Phillimore lowered his voice), "it isn't very pretty just now; though I wouldn't for the world hint such a thing upstairs. It isn't nice in point of colour; the flesh tones are particularly hot and overdone; it's wanting in expression, too, and repose; and I'm not at all sure that it's quite the right thing in point

of drawing. But it's not to be looked upon as a finished work at present: it's a mere sketch; and it's in very good hands, and I've no doubt they'll make something of it. Perhaps a Fiamingo modelled for Rubens; or if it should ultimately develop into a Study of a Child by Sir Joshua! a companion to Infancy—say—what a prize it would be, what a glorious thing! God bless me! only to think of it!" and the dealer grew so warm with his enthusiasm that he had to rub his bald head with a large red and green silk handkerchief quite laboriously.

"I thought the baby very pretty; but, perhaps, that was because I was godfather," remarked Mr. Martin.

"Well, I'm bound to say that it looks remarkably well from certain points of view. Very much depends upon the

pose. But in a particular *pose* everybody's good-looking almost. Sometimes the baby is a very nice object indeed. Only the other day, I was going upstairs, past the front drawing-room ; it was partly open, I couldn't help peeping in, just a very little. I was not noticed, and my curiosity harmed no one. But, near the fire-place, there was one of the loveliest compositions I think I ever beheld. It would have fetched any money at a sale. A perfect *riposa*. The father, in shadow, was by no means a bad St. Joseph, while the Madonna and Child were of course delicious, worthy of the best days of Italian art. I never felt so proud of my lodgers before."

There was a knock at the door.

"That's St. Joseph," said the dealer. "I know his knock. Don't go away. The Rembrandt will open the door.

Dear me, how I've been wasting time! I had something I particularly desired to say to you, but here have I been carried away by my foolish fancies about the Fine Arts, and my old picture-dealing habits. But look here. How shall I begin? Bless my soul how stupid I am!"

He walked up and down the room hurriedly, with an evidently embarrassed air. Then he stopped suddenly.

"They tell me," he said, with some solemnity, "that St. Joseph on the first floor is what's called an author—a writer—a literary gentleman. Is that so?"

"Yes. Mr. Wilford is the author of one or two books of some fame."

"Is he indeed, now? Well, so I was informed. Dear me! to think of that." Then, after a pause, he asked abruptly, "Is he poor?"

“Poor?”

“There—there. You’re astonished, you’re offended. I’ve said what I oughtn’t to; and it’s all no business of mine, and so on, and so on. But my motive is not impertinent—it’s all right and proper. I do assure you it is.”

“Doesn’t he pay his rent?” asked Mr. Martin, laughing.

“Yes, yes, he pays his rent—regular—to the day. I’ve not a word of complaint to make on that or on any other score. I may be doing wrong, though I don’t mean it. I’m only a tradesman, and I don’t know much out of my own line of business, perhaps, if you come to press me on that point. But I once knew a writer—a literary man, if you prefer it—who wasn’t rich, not by any means, who,

on the contrary, if I may say so, was deuced poor — uncommon, infernally. He lived in a garret not far from here, and was a good deal in debt, and wasn't often flush of money, and didn't dress very well—and, in fact, was about as shabby a looking beggar as you ever set eyes on; and wasn't over-clean, and not often sober—I never knew a fellow take so kindly to gin as he did. Well, they found him one day almost starving in his back attic, and I and some others helped to put him on his legs again; and you don't know how comfortable it made me feel doing that; for he was a clever fellow, no doubt of it—he wrote all the poetry for the big blacking establishment in the Strand, and I *have* heard say that he sometimes did verses for Catnach! A wonderfully clever

fellow, and very good company when he was sober! In fact, I may say, while I am on the subject, that I know him now, and that he comes to see me now and then, just to say how d'ye do, and borrow half-a-crown or so, and see if there is anything to drink anywhere about the premises. His name is Loafe, one of the Loafes of Cow Cross, I believe. However, that's neither here nor there. What I want to come to is this. I heard that my lodger, St. Joseph, was a writer, and then the thought came to me whether, for all his punctuality about his rent—for he is deuced proud, I know that—whether, for all that, he mightn't be poor too—not so bad as the other chap I was telling you about—Loafe—but still poor, hard up, you know, sometimes. And I wanted to say that if he'd rather

wait as to paying his rent, or if he'd rather not pay it at all, or if he'd like me even to lend him some money, or —by George—if he'd like me to give it him, he should have it, as much as he liked, as long as he liked, or for ever, if he chose!"

"I am sure, Mr. Phillimore, this is most kind—really generous, but—"

"Now don't be in a hurry. Though I live here I'm well off—as well off as many tradesmen that have left their shops for good and all, and gone to villas at Brixton. My wants are not many, and, in fact, I don't spend my income. A nice glass of port—not every day, mind you, or I shouldn't value it so much—first-rate washing for my neck-ties, and the best blacking for my boots. Those are my only extravagances; all the rest are simply neces-

saries, and cost a mere trifle. I go half-price to the play now and then, but what's that? If my lodgers want help, or anything that money can buy, they shall have it—by Jove they shall — or my name isn't Isaac Phillimore."

"But, my dear sir, 'they want nothing. Mr. Wilford is a steadily rising man; he's doing well—very well indeed. I should say he was making money fast. Authors are not what they were. Authors are not all like —like the gentleman — Mr. Loafe, I think you said—your friend, who composed the blacking acrostics in the back attic. Nowadays, literary gentlemen eat and drink of the best—in moderation—and ride in carriages, and don't wear shabby clothes, nor write verses for Catnach—at least not all of us. For I

must tell you, Mr. Phillimore—I, also, am an author.”

“ *You* an author? *You*, Mr. Martin? A superb Sir Thomas Lawrence! Can such things be? Say no more, I am convinced! Authors are changed indeed! An author a Sir Thomas Lawrence! I pictured him a tatterdemalion by Callot! Pray forgive me. And not a word to St. Joseph—I wouldn’t offend him for the world. And it’s all arisen from my love for my lodgers! I won’t detain you a moment longer. I dare say the dinner upstairs is waiting for you.”

The Sir Thomas Lawrence, his smile stretching to a hearty laugh, made his way to the drawing-room.

He was warmly greeted by Mr. Phillimore’s lodgers.

“ Hullo! here’s George at last! We

thought you'd forgotten us. How are you?" cried Wilford.

"How are you, Wil?—how do you do, Mrs. Wilford?—how's baby?"

"Now, Vi, let's have dinner. I think Martin's hungry, and I know I am."

Wilford Hadfield and his wife were residing on Mr. Phillimore's first floor. They were called Mr. and Mrs. Wilford.

"What a mistake!" quoth the picture dealer. "What injustice I've done the *riposa*. I feel that the Raphael would be very angry if she knew, while the Velasquez would turn to a Spagnoletto in expression! I should like to be of use to them. They're a charming group. But I've made a wrong start. I think I must put on another cravat, my emotion has crumpled this; and perhaps

have just a glass or two of port, to steady my nerves; perhaps go half-price to the play, to amuse myself. For there'll be a tremendous reaction after all this excitement!"

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